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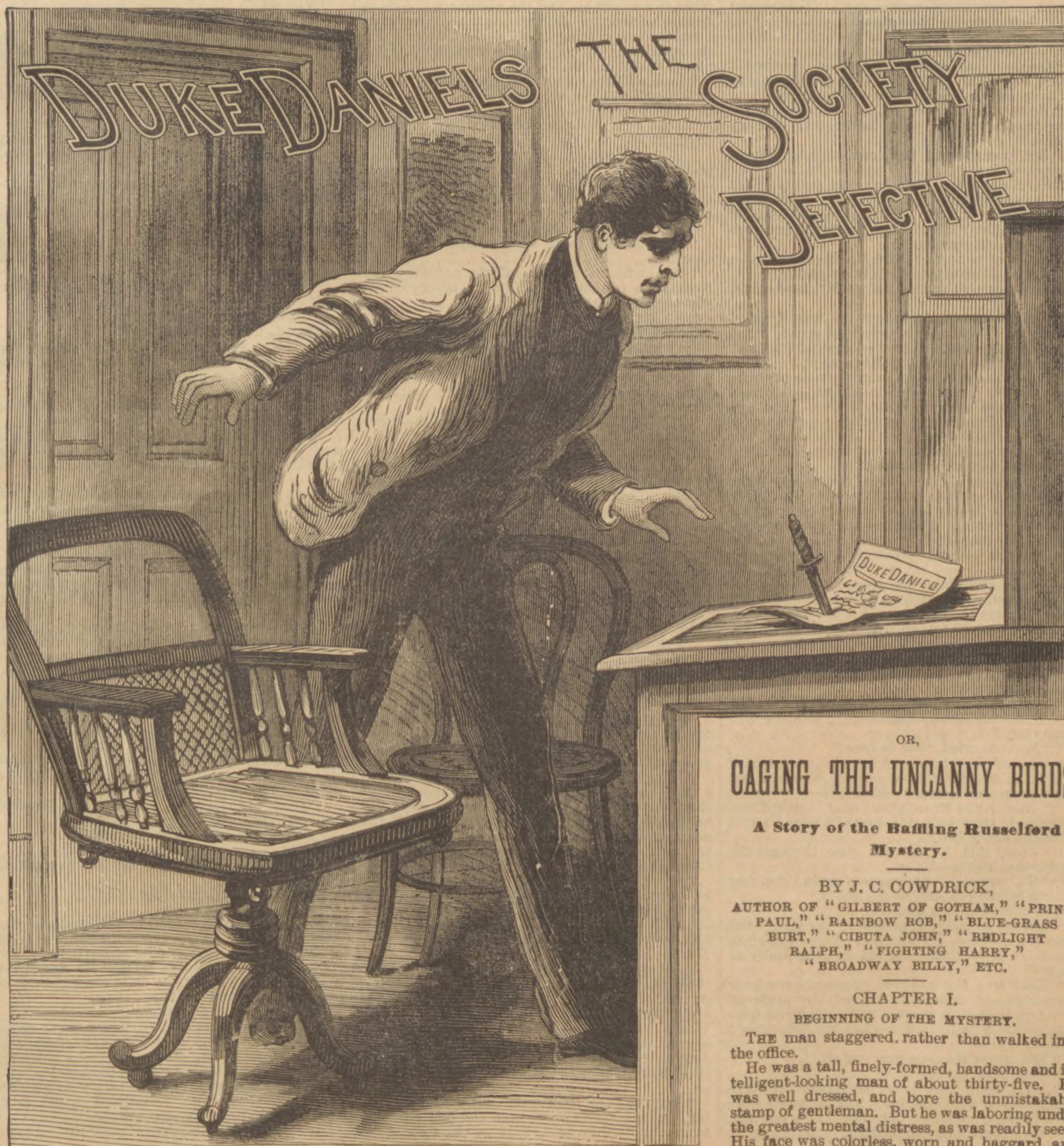
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LITTLE WONDER THAT IT CAUSED THE SOCIETY DETECTIVE A START!

OR, CAGING THE UNCANNY BIRDS.

A Story of the Baffling Russelford
Mystery.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "GILBERT OF GOTHAM," "PRINCE
PAUL," "RAINBOW BOB," "BLUE-GRASS
BURT," "CIBUTA JOHN," "REDLIGHT
RALPH," "FIGHTING HARRY,"
"BROADWAY BILLY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BEGINNING OF THE MYSTERY.

THE man staggered, rather than walked into the office.

He was a tall, finely-formed, handsome and intelligent-looking man of about thirty-five. He was well dressed, and bore the unmistakable stamp of gentleman. But he was laboring under the greatest mental distress, as was readily seen. His face was colorless, worn and haggard, and his eyes look red and strained.

Stopping when he had closed the door, he looked around.

Only one person was in the office, and that was a smooth-faced, serene and calm-looking man of middle age who was seated at a desk near one of the windows.

After a momentary pause the intruder spoke.

"Are you Mr. Daniels, sir?" he asked.

"That is my name," was the quiet and respectful answer.

"Duke Daniels, the Detective?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, sir, I beg you to hear my story, take my case and move heaven and earth to find my lost child!"

As the man uttered these words, rapidly and earnestly, he strode forward and sunk down upon a chair near the desk.

"You are Mr. Henry Russelford?" the detective observed, with an interrogative inflection.

"Yes," the man acknowledged, "I am he," and added: "But, how came you to know me? I have never seen you before."

"Nor have I ever seen you before—at any rate not that I am aware of," returned the detective. "I have read in the papers, however, the account given of your mysterious case, and the moment you entered I guessed who you were. When you mentioned your lost child, then I knew that my guess had been correct. Have the police found no clew to the mystery yet?"

"Not the slightest, sir, and I am in despair. My wife is almost crazed. I must find my child, or at least learn something of her fate, if she be dead. Will you take up the case and help me? You shall be free to name your own reward, and my whole fortune is at your command."

"I will take the case, sir, and gladly," the detective promised and emphasized. "The account of it in the papers has aroused my interest," he confessed, "and I am glad of the opportunity to try my hand at solving the riddle."

"Good! You have been highly recommended to me, and I am glad that I have been able to secure your service. When will you begin?"

"Now—this minute, sir. I will hear your story, and we will talk the matter over at length."

"But you say you have read all about it in the papers."

"So I have, but there may be points which they have not given. I would like to hear all about it from you, sir. Please go ahead and put the case before me as though I had no previous knowledge concerning it."

The detective leaned back in his chair as he said this, and awaited his client's pleasure.

It was some moments before Mr. Russelford spoke.

"I ought to be able to put the case briefly, plainly and easily," he presently spoke, "but somehow I am not. However, I will do the best I can with those three objects in view."

"I am a man of means, and have no particular vocation. I reside at No. — West — street, and own the house in which I live. You will notice that I am beginning at the beginning, to double on that word; that I am following the bent of the questions put to me by the police."

"All the better; go ahead."

"My household consisted of myself, my wife, my little daughter and four servants. Our home was a happy one. I have been married about five years. My little daughter—our only child—was about four years old. Night before last she was put to bed at her usual hour, and about eleven o'clock my wife and I retired. At that time the child was sleeping sweetly. I bade my wife good-night and went to my own room just across the hall. I was soon asleep, and did not wake up until I was awakened by my wife knocking at the door and calling me, and it was then after daylight."

"I opened the door to her immediately, and she excitedly asked:

"Where is Eulalie?"

"I do not know," I answered; "is she not in your room?"

"No," she cried, "she is gone!"

"Gone!" I echoed; "what do you mean? The little tot must have opened the door and gone down-stairs, and we shall find—"

"That is the strange part of it," my wife interrupted; "the door was locked just as I left it when I went to bed."

"Then," said I, "she has gone through the bath-room and so—"

"No," my wife interrupted again, "for that door is locked too, and on the inside."

The detective here broke in.

"Excuse me, Mr. Russelford," he said, "but here is a question I would ask: Were you all in the habit of locking your doors so carefully at night?"

"Yes," was the answer, "since about a year ago, when our house was robbed by burglars."

"And your wife was not mistaken about finding her door still locked when she first missed the child?"

"She insists that she was not, sir."

"Very well; go on, sir."

"Well, there was great excitement immediately, as you can imagine. The servants were called and questioned, but they knew nothing. They were as much alarmed and grieved as we

ourselves, almost. It was a mystery—it is a mystery still!

"Where can our child be? How did she get out of that room? Heavens! these questions must be answered, or I shall go mad, mad!"

As he uttered the exclamations, Mr. Russelford sprang to his feet and began to pace the floor.

The detective did not interrupt him for some moments, but after a while he asked:

"Is that all you can tell me, Mr. Russelford?"

"That is the whole case, sir," was the answer.

"My wife positively asserts that both the doors of her room were locked on the inside when she awoke, and that the child was gone. It is possible that she may be mistaken about the door despite her absolute statement, but there is no mistake about the disappearance of the child."

"We searched that room thoroughly, and also the bath-room adjoining, not leaving a place unexplored that could conceal a mouse. It was all to no purpose. The little one was not to be found."

"And then you called the police to your assistance?"

"Yes."

"And they discovered nothing that pointed to a clew, eh?"

"Not the slightest thing, sir. They are completely baffled."

"I noticed in the papers that you and they did not think it possible that the child could have been taken out through a window, owing to the fact that there were mosquito-nettings in the windows. Could she not have lifted one of them?"

"You do not understand that point, sir. The netting spoken of is on the outside, and covers the whole window. I had bow frames made when it was put up, and the netting put on those frames, so that the shutters could be operated as usual. That netting is in perfect order at all the windows, which is proof positive that no one passed in or out that way."

"I see. There is only one other view to take of the matter, then, is there?"

"And what is that?"

"That your wife must indeed be mistaken about finding the door locked."

"It would seem so, but her assertion is most positive. She says that the moment she discovered that Eulalie was not in her crib, she looked to the door to see if she had gone out, and the door was locked on the inside."

"Well, it is a remarkable case, true enough."

"You do not mean to give up, do you?" in alarm.

"Not without a fair effort, anyhow, sir. Now, have you any suspicion or theory which you have not expressed?"

"No, sir, none."

"You must bear in mind, sir, that if you want me to help you, you must hold nothing back."

"God knows I have no desire to hold anything back, sir. Would that I could start you upon the right track."

"What kind of locks are they upon the doors of that room?"

"Ordinary locks, I suppose they are."

"It is possible to turn the key in such a lock on the outside, you are aware, and thus lock or unlock the door."

"Yes, the police brought that up, but it happens that there were bolts as well as locks."

"Worse and worse. I believe this is something entirely new in my detective experience. But, sir, rest assured I will put forth every effort to solve the mystery, whatever it is."

"Thank you, sir, and may you succeed. I believe that if the truth is not soon brought to light, my wife's reason will give way."

"I sincerely hope not, but it must be a terrible anxiety. Well, I will call at your house within an hour, with your permission."

"Yes, do so; the sooner the better."

Mr. Russelford went sorrowfully away.

As soon as he had gone, the detective threw one leg up on his desk, leaned further back in his chair, partly closed one eye, and looked long and steadily at the ceiling.

"Well," he reflected, "here is a mystery with a vengeance. What am I to think about it? I hardly know. It seems plain that the child did not get out of the room by a window, and if the doors were really found locked on the inside, as the mother of the child stoutly maintains, then the question is—How did she get out?"

"It is a stumper, and no mistake. But, let me look further. Could the parents have any object in concealing the little one, and then coming out with a such story? If so, they have made a blundering job of it. But, I cannot credit that. Mr. Russelford's grief is only too genuine."

"Let me look still further. What object could the mother have, alone, to put the little girl out of the way? But, in the face of that is her story about the locked and bolted doors. Would she not have been more likely to have opened the room door, and perhaps the street door as well, to give the impression that the child had wandered out of the house? It looks so."

"In spite of all, however, I cannot help thinking that she knows more than she has told. It seems simply impossible that the child could get

out of the room without her knowledge. Taken altogether, it is about one of the strangest affairs that ever came under my notice. I am eager to see the end of it."

For something like half an hour he sat thus in thought; then he got up, prepared for the street, locked the door of his office and went away, and in due time presented himself at the Russelford residence.

CHAPTER II.

A PUZZLING QUESTION.

DUKE DANIELS stood in the first rank in his profession.

His office was in the neighborhood of Murray Hill, his clients were chiefly persons in the upper-ten circle, and he had come to be known as the "Society" Detective of the city.

He was forty years old, of medium height, and had a slim and wiry figure. He was faultlessly but plainly attired in black, and might easily have been mistaken for a clergyman. His face was clean shaved, and its expression was one of great serenity.

His ring was answered by a trim and intelligent-looking servant, who asked his name, and when he had given it, invited him into the library.

There he found Mr. Russelford awaiting him.

"I am here as agreed," the detective spoke.

"And I am glad you are come," Mr. Russelford greeted. "My wife is almost wild, so great is her grief, and we must do something to give her hope."

"I am here to do what I can, and we will begin immediately."

"Shall I take you up to the room?"

"Not yet, sir. Did I understand you to say that you keep four servants?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are their duties?"

"One is our cook; another has charge of the dining-room and attends the door; the other two have general charge of the rest of the house, and do the laundry work."

"Will you call the cook and let me ask her a few questions?"

"Certainly."

In a few moments the cook came nervously into the room. She was a large, pleasant-faced Irishwoman of about forty.

"What time did you get up yesterday morning?" the detective asked.

"At six o'clock, sor, me usual toime," was the answer.

"Did you notice anything out of order about the house? Were any of the doors or windows open or unfastened?"

"Not a wan, sor. Everything was in order, sor."

"Where do you sleep?"

"In dhe top flure, back, sor."

"Did you hear any noise in the house during the night? or did you hear any one moving around before you got up?"

"Nathur, sor."

"That is all. Mr. Russelford, I would like now to see the other three servants together."

They were called, and about the same questions were put to them, but no light was thrown upon the matter. Their answers were about the same as the cook's.

When they were dismissed the detective announced that he was ready to see the room from which the child had so mysteriously disappeared.

Mr. Russelford led him up to it.

It was a room on the second floor, front, on the right-hand side of the hall. Opposite was another room just like it. That was Mr. Russelford's.

When the two men entered the room, the first thing the detective did was to examine the fastenings of the door. The lock, he found, was not an "ordinary" one, but was larger and more substantial. There was a little brass bolt on the door, too, about half way between top and bottom.

The detective noted that a child of four could not reach the bolt without the aid of a chair.

Next, before he paid attention to anything else, he went to examine the doors of the bath-room. Of these there were two.

"Which of these doors was fastened?" he asked of Mr. Russelford.

"The further one," was the reply.

"That opens into another bedroom?"

"It is a room that my wife uses as a sitting and sewing-room."

"And that opens upon the hall?"

"It does."

The detective looked at the fastenings of that door, and found them about the same as those of the other—the one leading to the hall.

With these two doors fastened as described, it was impossible that the child could get out of the room by either of them.

He went next to the windows.

Outside were light frames, made in the shape of small bow windows, and over them was tacked wire netting. There was not a hole anywhere that even a fly could get through.

The detective was forced to return to his first suspicion, that Mrs. Russelford knew more about the matter than any one else.

He looked around the room carefully. It was

handsomely furnished, containing stands, bureau, table, wardrobe, etc. There were two closets.

"It is useless for me to ask if you have searched these closets well, and looked in the stands and drawers, I suppose?" he observed.

"We have looked everywhere," was the answer. "The child is not in the house, for there is no place that we have not searched."

"Very well; and now, if I may, I should like to see Mrs. Russellford."

"She is right here in the back sitting-room."

Mr. Russellford led the way, knocked, and being told to come, opened the door and ushered the detective in.

Mrs. Russellford was seated in a reclining chair, looking pale and haggard, and her eyes were red and swollen with much weeping.

She was about thirty years of age, and, in spite of her present appearance, handsome. Her beauty was of that charming type which can be called neither brunette nor blonde. Her features were delicate and perfectly outlined, and her expression was girlish and innocent. She was slender, without any sacrifice of perfect contour, and seemed to be, sitting, of commanding height.

Mr. Russellford introduced the detective, and she greeted him with an inclination of the head and a few suitable words.

"I am here, madam," the detective said, when he had taken a seat at her invitation, "to render what assistance I can toward clearing up this terrible mystery. You will permit me to ask some questions?"

"A thousand, sir, if you desire," was the answer. "I only hope that I can say something that will give you a clue. Oh, sir, only restore my child to my arms, and you will have earned my undying gratitude!"

The detective was puzzled.

He had allowed himself to hold a suspicion against this woman before seeing her, and had expected that her face would in a measure confirm that suspicion. He was greatly mistaken. If ever there was an innocent face, he was obliged to confess, it was hers. And now her words—Was it possible that she could act a part so perfectly?

These thoughts flashed through his mind while she was speaking.

"I want to ask, first of all, madam," he said, "whether you are positively sure that both the doors leading from your room were locked and bolted when you awoke and first missed your child?"

"I am, sir," was the answer.

"There is no shadow of a doubt in your mind on this point?"

"Not the slightest, sir. I know that both doors were locked and bolted, just as I left them when I went to bed. Had either of the doors been open, I would have supposed that the child had got up and gone out, and would probably have dressed before I followed to find her. But the doors were both secured, inside, and, filled with a nameless fear, I rushed out and called Mr. Russellford."

"What were your first words to him?"

"Really, sir, I cannot say."

"Where is Eulalie?" were your first words," supplied Mr. Russellford.

"Perhaps they were," she sighed.

"How did you suppose that your husband would know where she was?" the detective asked.

"You certainly did not expect to find her in his room, when she had no way of getting out of your own?"

"I do not know what I thought, sir. My child was gone. I could not understand how she had got out of the room, and I followed my first impulse, which was to call my husband and inform him."

"Your explanation is perfectly satisfactory. Now we are called upon to look this case squarely in the face. Here we have the strange phenomenon of a child four years of age being spirited out of a closed and locked room by some means that is beyond our comprehension."

The detective was looking straight at Mrs. Russellford as he spoke.

Her face remained passive.

"I, for one, do not believe that the supernatural takes any part in the affairs of men of to-day," he resumed. "Your child went out, or was taken out, of that room by means perfectly natural. Now, then, the question is—How?"

Husband and wife were silent.

"Mrs. Russellford," the detective suddenly asked, "are you a somnambulist?"

"No, sir," she answered, "I am not."

"Is there any one in your family given to somnambulism?"

"No, sir, not that I am aware of."

"Why do you ask that?" inquired Mr. Russellford.

"For this reason: If Mrs. Russellford were given to sleep-walking, or even any one in her family, I would be inclined to think that she has taken the child out herself, disposed of it somewhere and somehow—unconsciously, of course, and then returned and locked the door again."

This was so new, so startling, that both his listeners turned pale.

"Is it possible?" Mr. Russellford gasped.

"It is not," Mrs. Russellford assured "I

have never been a sleep-walker, and know that I am not one. I sleep quite soundly, on the contrary."

The detective was watching her narrowly.

"How, then, are we to explain this enigma?" he demanded.

"That is what is fast driving me crazy," the lady cried, pressing her hands to her head.

"Have you any enemy, Mr. Russellford, who could have any motive in striking you such a blow as this?"

"Not that I know of," was the reply.

"One point more, one which I have been holding for the last, and I shall be through for the present, I think. Do you think any person can have been concealed in your room when you retired, Mrs. Russellford?"

"I know that there was not," was the positive response. "I am very nervous, have been ever since the night the burglars entered our house a year ago, and before going to bed I make it a point to look well about the room, every night. I did this on the night in question."

"You looked in every place where a person might be concealed?"

"I can answer for her," spoke up Mr. Russellford. "It has generally been a duty imposed upon me to search the room for her before going to my own. I did it on that night. There was certainly no one in the room but her and Eulalie."

"That knocks away my last prop," the detective confessed. "Now I do not know what to think. It is about the greatest puzzle that I ever met with."

CHAPTER III.

A RATHER STARTLING FIND.

THE detective's words had a depressing effect.

Mrs. Russellford sunk further back in her reclining chair with something very like a groan, and Mr. Russellford looked anything but pleased.

"I thought we should have some encouragement from you, at least," the latter observed.

He could not see that the detective's suspicion was directed against his wife to a certain extent, and that he was trying her.

Daniels remembered that Mr. Russellford had requested him, in a manner, to build up his wife's hope, but the detective was a man who would not let sentiment stand in the way of business.

He had wanted to test the woman to the last degree. He had done so, but his mind was far from settled with regard to her. Was she entirely innocent? or was she an actress most consummate? He could not decide.

"To say that I am puzzled," he defended, "does not necessarily imply that I consider the case hopeless. Far from it. I promise you that I will bring my utmost endeavors to bear upon the matter, but I cannot be expected to ferret out the mystery in a moment. It will take time to do that."

"Then you do think that we have reason to hope on," said Mr. Russellford, eager to have something said on that head for his wife's sake.

"Do not give up hope for a moment," the detective advised. "I believe that your child will be restored to you, alive and well."

This was saying more than he had reason to believe, having nothing to guide him to that conclusion, but it pleased Mr. Russellford.

The detective had risen to go.

"One thing I would like to ask before you go," remarked Mr. Russellford.

"And what is that?"

"You seemed to lay stress upon the possibility of some one having been in the room that night when my wife locked the doors and retired. How could that person have gone out of the room and left the doors still secured?"

"A man or woman might easily have done it," was the detective's answer, "provided he or she knew the trick and was prepared for the emergency. Of course the child could not have accomplished the feat."

"I cannot understand it," declared Mr. Russellford, in a puzzled way.

"I have read of such a thing," said his wife, showing interest, "but I never believed it."

"In order to convince you I will perform the trick for your satisfaction as well as for my own, for I desire to make the experiment, anyhow. Can you provide me with a piece of strong thread, Mr. Russellford?"

That gentleman soon found the required article, and he and his wife followed the detective out to the other room.

The detective took the thread, which was about a yard long, and taking it at its middle, looped it once around the button of the little brass bolt. That done, he ran one end through the back-end of the bolt-guard, bringing both ends forward, then, and hanging them over the point of the bolt.

"Now," he announced, "I am ready. Pay attention."

Taking hold of the threads, carefully, so that the button of the bolt might not fall into its niche, he closed the door, taking the ends of the thread with him to the outside.

As soon as the door was closed the bolt slipped forward into its socket, and the next moment the key was seen to turn in the lock.

Mr. and Mrs. Russellford were amazed.

There was a momentary pause, and then the bolt slipped back again, the key turned, and the detective stepped in.

"You see it is possible," he observed.

"It is astonishing!" exclaimed Mr. Russellford.

"You have actually opened a locked and bolted door, and from the outside, too."

"I could not have done so, however, sir," said the detective, "had I not had the thread already attached."

"I know that, but may not this explain the mystery of our missing child?"

"How, if you are sure there was no one in the room that night when Mrs. Russellford fastened the doors?"

"The thread may have been previously fixed in place, so that the door could be opened just as you have opened it, and when the intruder went out he could have locked it in the same manner, pulling the thread out after he had done so."

"We must ask what Mrs. Russellford has to say about that."

"I have this to say," that lady spoke up: "I and my husband know there was no one in this room when I retired. I know there was no thread on the bolt. I could not have failed to notice it if there had been. Further, I always press the button of the bolt down into its niche."

"That disposes of the theory completely," declared the detective. "It looks as though we should have to fall back upon the supernatural hypothesis, after all. But, as I have said, I do not base anything upon that."

"You are not speaking very encouragingly now," complained Mrs. Russellford.

"We are not talking of the case as a whole," explained the detective, "but of this point, trying to conjecture how the child got out of the room."

The lady now became hysterical, or, more properly, gave way to her sorrow anew, and her husband led her back to the sitting-room.

The detective followed, ready to lend assistance in case she fainted.

When she reached the room, Mr. Russellford placed his wife in her chair, after which he turned to the detective, and was about to speak when there came a knock at the door.

This interrupted, and the gentleman turned from what he was going to say, and bade the applicant enter.

It was a servant.

"Your mail, sir," she announced, and she handed him some letters.

Mr. Russellford took them, and, as the servant withdrew and closed the door, he ran over them rapidly, glancing at the superscriptions.

"One for you, dear," he announced, extending one to his wife.

Mrs. Russellford held out her hand languidly and received it, and the detective noticed that it was a common buff envelope and that it was directed in a masculine hand.

He noticed more. As the lady glanced at it she gave a start, her face grew even more pale for a second, and her eyes turned quickly upon her husband, as though to see whether he was looking, as though fearful that he might detect her agitation.

So much the detective saw, then he looked another way, for he knew that the lady's eyes would be turned upon him immediately.

He was looking at Mr. Russellford when she did glance at him, and she put the letter into her pocket unopened.

This had occupied barely one second of time, and positively not more than two; for almost immediately after Mr. Russellford had handed the letter to his wife, he turned to the detective with an apology.

"Pardon me," he said, "for this discourtesy: I was about to say, sir, that perhaps we had better return to the library, if you are through with your investigation here."

"I am through, sir," answered the detective, "and with your permission will take my leave."

"Very well."

The detective bowed to Mrs. Russellford, and followed Mr. Russellford from the room and down-stairs.

"You will let me know immediately if you discover anything, of course," Mr. Russellford observed.

"Yes, sir," was the response; "and you must not fail to apprise me of anything new that may turn up."

After a further exchange of words they parted, and the detective set out to return to his office.

He was in a meditative mood.

"It is about the strangest case that I ever tackled!" he exclaimed in mind. "How did that child get out of that room? The only explanation I can offer is that the mother had something to do with it, and yet she will insist that she found the doors fastened on the inside. She will not let me show a possible manner in which the child may have been taken away by some one. She cuts every foundation from under me, and she has now, if her statements about the locks and bolts be all true, narrowed the case down so that the child must indeed

have been spirited away by a power greater than human.

"But, bah! that is nonsense! I shall not have to look beyond the natural to find the solution. Now, what am I to think of that woman? She has the face of an angel, for innocence and purity, but, is she as innocent as she looks? It is clear that no thought of suspicion against her has entered the mind of her husband. As for him, I am satisfied that he has had no part in the child's disappearance.

"Would that I could come at the truth at once, but that is not to be thought of. It means hard work ahead. I must pry into that family, on both sides, and if there is a skeleton in the closet I must bring it forth and inspect it. That little girl, only four years old, has not disappeared in this manner without some great and powerful object. What has been that motive? Who will be benefited by her absence?

"None of these questions can I answer now, but I must push the case till I learn the truth of it. Duke Daniels, your reputation is at stake."

He was walking on as he communed thus with himself, his wiry form erect and his step brisk and firm.

"And there is that letter," he further mused. "I would give much to see that. I must see it! The woman gave a start when she recognized the writing, and her face took on a startled and troubled look for an instant. I saw it, though she is not aware of that. I must play a point to get hold of that letter."

In due time he reached the building in which his office was located, mounted the stairs to the second floor, took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door of his room and went in.

Everything was as he had left it, apparently, and of course he had no reason to think that he might find things otherwise.

He put his hat and coat into a closet, donned his office-coat and stepped forward to his desk.

He was on the point of sitting down, when something on his desk caught his eye and arrested the motion. He gave a start of surprise, steel-nerved detective though he was.

There on the desk, where it could not escape being seen, was a sheet of paper on which was a very creditable drawing of a coffin. On the lid, in well executed letters, was a name, and that name was—"Duke Daniels!"

Nor was that all, for the sheet of paper was pinned to the desk by the point of a dagger.

Little wonder that it caused the Society Detective a start!

CHAPTER IV.

DANIELS LEARNS SOMETHING.

DUKE DANIELS sat down, after a moment, and interlocking his fingers, laid his arms on the edge of the desk and leaned forward in a thoughtful attitude.

"This is a rather startling find," he mused, "and I wonder what it means? It looks like a threat from some quarter or other."

As yet he did not touch the dagger or paper. That they had not been there when he left the office, was certain, and that they were there now could not be questioned.

In going out he had locked the door, and on returning had had to unlock it in order to get in. The dagger and paper had been put there during his absence, and whoever had brought them had skillfully unlocked the door and locked it again.

Who could that person be?

The paper was a piece of strong, white foolscap with a red marginal line, and the drawing and lettering were in pencil. The pencil used had been a medium hard one, and very black. The dagger was a small and neat one, having a keen and slender blade and a chased silver handle.

The detective looked keenly around for some further trace of his mysterious caller, but found none. Nothing in the office had been disturbed, so far as he could tell.

Drawing the dagger out of the desk top he examined it.

There was no name on it, and no letter was to be found. Nor was there any distinguishing mark that he could discover that might lead to its owner's identity.

Laying that aside, he took up the paper.

It was a half-sheet, and was once folded. On the side that had been down was some writing in pencil. It was as follows:

"MR. DUKE DANIELS, Detective:—

"SIR:—You are respectfully warned to go slow. You had better drop the Russellford case before you begin it. If by any chance you should strike the right track, death will be the result if you attempt to follow it. Be warned in time.

"Yours, in earnest,

"I. C. ALLTHINGS."

If the detective had been surprised at the finding of the dagger and the uncanny drawing, this note surprised him more.

It was but little more than an hour since Mr. Russellford had come to engage his service, and already he was warned by some unknown person against undertaking the case!

The writing of the note was in a good, bold hand, but it was slanted backward as though for the purpose of disguise. The wording, spelling

and punctuation were all right, showing that the writer was not uneducated.

When he had studied it for a time the detective laid it down, and leaning back in his chair gave himself up to thought.

Here were several clues, the dagger, paper, writing, drawing; but he did not see how he could make use of any of them, at any rate not yet. They were not by any means to be despised, however.

"I must find out the author of this note," the detective reflected. "Finding him, I shall find a person who knows all about the mystery of little Eulalie Russellford's disappearance. But, how to find him? He has not left me a lock of his hair," he facetiously speculated, "nor even a button for the detective's benefit, as such fellows 'most always do in novels."

"I know something about him, none the less, however. I know that he is a good penman, though this writing is no doubt an attempt at disguise; that he understands the burglar's art of getting through locked doors; that he can draw fairly well and is not by any means uneducated. And these are clues that may prove of value to me before the case is done."

"I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. I. C. Allthings, I am sure. If you do see all things, though, it is plain that you do not know all things. You do not know the man you are dealing with in me. I am not afraid of your threat, and am not to be scared off by it. On the contrary, I shall take hold of the matter all the more determinedly, if that is possible."

"Now," communing further with his thoughts, "this means a return to the Russellford residence. I must learn whether either Mr. or Mrs. Russellford has ever seen this dagger, or recognizes this writing. And that will give me a chance to get a look at that letter Mrs. Russellford received while I was there. I am interested in that, for it did not cause the emotion she showed on receiving it without some good reason."

He glanced at his watch.

The time was running on to noon, and a little reflection led him to the decision that he would have his dinner before proceeding further. This would consume some time, and would bring him to the house at about the time the family were having theirs, a circumstance he desired.

Acting upon that plan, it was about a quarter to one when he rung the bell of the Russellford residence the second time.

The same servant came to the door, recognized him, and stood aside for him to enter, without question.

The detective stepped within, asking as he did so:

"Is Mr. Russellford in?"

"He is at dinner," was the answer. "I will show you to the library and inform him."

"Yes, do so."

He knew that Mr. Russellford would come to him anyhow as soon as his name was mentioned, eager to learn whether he had discovered anything, so he fell in with the suggestion of the servant without debate.

Barely a minute had he been in the library when Mr. Russellford came in, carrying his dinner napkin in hand.

"You have discovered something?" he interrogatively exclaimed.

"No, I cannot say that I have," was the detective's reply. "I desire to take one more look at that room up-stairs. Do not let me take you from your dinner, however, for I can wait. Or, if you have no objections, I can go on up, since I know the way."

This last was put as a sort of afterthought, but it was the very point the detective desired to gain.

"No objection whatever," Mr. Russellford assured. "Go right ahead, Mr. Daniels, and if you will excuse me I will join you as soon as I have finished."

"Thank you, sir, and do not hurry yourself. By the way, I trust Mrs. Russellford is able to be down to dinner."

Another important point in the detective's plan, but he put it in such a way that it could not arouse suspicion.

"She is down, as the doctor insisted upon, but she eats nothing—or next to nothing. This awful strain is telling upon us both."

"I do not wonder, and I hope we may soon see light ahead. Well, do not let me keep you a moment. I will go on up to the room, where you will find me."

"I will join you shortly."

The detective hastened up the stairs. So far his point was carried. Now to find the letter which he desired to see.

He entered the room from which the little girl had so wonderfully vanished, and noting that no one was there, turned the key.

Knowing that his time would be limited, he made no pause that might waste any of it. His objective point was the back sitting-room.

Stepping to the bath-room, he found to his satisfaction that the door of the other room was open.

Going on, he tapped lightly at the door, and getting no response, pushed it further open and went in.

No one was there, and he looked around in his

keen-eyed way, as though trying to take in everything at the first glance.

Near the reclining-chair on which he had seen Mrs. Russellford on the occasion of his first visit was another chair, and on that was a small lap writing-desk. Here was evidence that Mrs. Russellford had been writing.

Stricken with grief as she was, unable to eat, her reason in the balance, as it was feared, she was, nevertheless, not unable to write. This told against her in the detective's mind.

Still, he reasoned, it might have been something important that she had desired to communicate: something that did not admit of delay, and which had no bearing whatever upon the case.

But that supposition in her favor did not satisfy him. He must know the nature of that letter she had received if possible.

No letter was to be seen, and he naturally inferred that whatever she had written was in the desk, unless she had already had it posted. He tried the lid of the desk and found it locked.

Stepping to the door of that room he turned the key in the lock, in order that no one should come in upon him unawares, and that done he sprang back to the desk, took a ring of small wire keys from his pocket, tried them one after another, and soon had the satisfaction of having the desk open to his inspection.

About the first thing that met his eye was the buff envelope he had seen before, the one that had caused Mrs. Russellford the start he had noticed.

Catching it up, he drew out its contents and read. It was as follows:

"MRS. RUSSELLFORD:—

"I am hard up and you must help me—No time wasted either or I will call on your husband—I want a hundred and you don't want to send me no less—You can spare it without feelin' it I know—Send at once or I'll come for it—Send to my name to Station C. I am down on my luck.

"Yours,

"MAX."

The detective felt that his search was growing "warm," as children say when playing "button," and that he was on the right track.

Who was this Max? What hold had he upon Mrs. Russellford?

There was no time for him to stop to study the point now. He was likely to be interrupted at any moment. He looked further, hoping to find the letter that Mrs. Russellford had written, but it was not there. It was probable that she had taken it down with her in order to send it out to a post-box.

He was about to close the desk when he espied a blotting-pad. Not hoping that it would reveal anything, he took it up nevertheless and looked at it, when to his surprise and satisfaction he found that it was new and clean and had few ink-stains upon it.

Stepping quickly to a looking-glass he held it before it, and to his immense satisfaction made out:

"MR. MAX BARROWS,

"P. O. STATION C.,

"City."

His point was carried. He had gained the information desired. Now, in spite of her pretty face and innocent manner, his suspicion against Mrs. Russellford had some foundation.

Hurriedly returning the blotter and letter to the desk, he locked it as he had found it, and that done, unfastened the door of the room and hastened through to the other room. Unlocking the door there, he had just seated himself when Mr. Russellford came in.

The detective was found sitting comfortably in a rocker, as calm and easy as though he had been sitting there half an hour.

CHAPTER V.

PATIENCE REWARDED.

"HAVE I kept you waiting?" Mr. Russellford asked.

"Not at all," answered the detective.

"And have you found what you wanted? or learned what you desired to know?"

"Yes, I am glad to say that I have. By the way,"—in order to change the subject quickly—"do you recognize this, Mr. Russellford?"

As he put the question the detective displayed the dagger that had come into his possession in so mysterious a way.

"Good heavens!" was the exclamation, "has my child been murdered?"

"No, no," the detective quickly assured, "do not think that. I have no such idea, sir. This weapon came into my hands in rather a peculiar manner, and I desire to know whether you have ever seen it before, that is all."

Mr. Russellford took the dagger and looked at it.

"I do not think that I have ever seen it before," he testified.

"I had little hope that you would recognize it," said the detective. "I wanted to make sure, however."

He returned the dagger to his pocket and drew out the threatening note that had accompanied it.

Opening it, he handed it to Mr. Russellford, asking:

"Do you recognize this writing?"

"No," after glancing at it, "I believe I do not."

"Read it, sir."

Mr. Russellford did so.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"You know as much about it as I do," was the response. "I suppose it means what it says."

"And where did you get it?"

"That is the strange part of it, sir. I will tell you. You will observe that the paper has a hole in it. Well, when I returned to my office from here I found the paper on my desk, pinned there by the point of the dagger."

"Is it possible?"

"Both possible and positive, sir. My office was locked, but that made no difference. Look on the other side of the sheet and you will see the illustration, or picture-writing, that was intended to catch my eye."

Mr. Russellford looked, and he could not repress a start.

"This is a threat," he cried. "Who can be the author of it?"

"That is what I want to find out," answered the detective. "I thought that possibly you could help me, but I see that you cannot."

"No, I cannot."

"There is something back of this case, Mr. Russellford. Whoever took your child had some powerful motive in doing so. You must have an enemy, sir."

"As I have told you before, I have no enemy that I am aware of."

"It is very strange. Will you allow me to ask a delicate question?"

"Ask anything you want to, Mr. Daniels."

"You and Mrs. Russellford are the real parents of the child, are you not? That is to say, the child was not adopted by you?"

"I understand you. Yes, we are her real parents."

"That is a point that I wanted to be positive about before proceeding further in the case. Has Mrs. Russellford come up from dinner yet?"

"I think I just heard her enter the sitting-room."

The detective knew that he had heard her.

"I must show her these—dagger and paper, and see whether she recognizes either of them. Perhaps you had better speak to her first, so that the sight of the dagger will not cause her a shock."

"You are thoughtful. Yes, I will do so. Wait here a moment, and when I call you come."

Mr. Russellford passed through the bath-room and into the sitting-room; a few moments elapsed, and then he called to the detective to come.

Daniels went in, the dagger and paper in his hand.

Mrs. Russellford was again in her reclining chair, and the writing-desk had been put away.

"I must apologize for troubling you again, madam," the detective said. "I presume your husband has told you what I desire to ask."

"Yes," she answered, "he has. Let me see the articles."

He placed them in her hands.

She looked at them, read the note, and handed them back with a sigh.

"I never saw the dagger before," she said, "and I do not recognize the writing. It is all an awful mystery. Oh! my poor child! my poor little Eulalie!"

Covering her face with her hands she sobbed aloud, and tears ran out between her fingers and dropped upon her bosom.

Duke Daniels was puzzled.

There was no acting about this. Her grief was genuine. Still, he could but think she knew more about the mystery than she would tell.

"You cannot even guess who this enemy may be?" the detective interrogated.

"No, no, I have not the slightest idea, sir."

He had gained the point he had in view in coming to the house, and considered that he had done well enough for the time being.

With a sign to Mr. Russellford that he would ask no more, he withdrew to the other room, where Mr. Russellford joined him as soon as he had called one of the servants to stay with his wife.

A brief conversation was held, amounting to little of interest, and Daniels took his leave.

He set out for the post-office station to which Max Barrows had directed Mrs. Russellford to send the money he had demanded.

He did not expect that the man would come to the office before late in the afternoon or early in the evening, but he could not afford to take any chance of missing him.

Inquiring at the delivery window what time a letter ought to reach there from West—street, posted between twelve and one o'clock, he was told, and saw that he would have considerable time on his hands.

It was not certain that Barrows knew anything about that, though, and he was likely to come at any time.

While the detective waited, he wrote notes of instruction to men in his employ, telling one of

them to come and relieve him at five o'clock. These notes he posted with "Special" stamps, thus insuring an immediate delivery.

When he had done that, he took his station near the delivery window and began in earnest his tedious wait.

When he had stood there about an hour, the curiosity of the delivery clerk became so great that he had to speak. He had had an eye of suspicion upon the detective for some time, despite the fact that he had inquired about a letter. It did not look reasonable that a sane man would stand right there and wait so long, he reasoned.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" he asked.

Daniels turned and faced him.

"I guess not," he answered lazily.

"Oh! you are the man who asked about the time it would take for a letter to come here from West—street, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you misunderstood me."

"I guess not; you said half-past four, did you not?"

"Yes, that is what I said. I thought it funny that you should wait right here all the time, though."

"Don't think about it at all," the detective advised. "Don't let my presence here trouble you in the least."

He turned away as he said that, and the curiosity of the clerk was increased tenfold.

Half-past four came, then five o'clock, but, to the surprise of the clerk, the man did not offer to ask for his expected letter. He had to speak again.

"That mail is here now, sir," he said.

"Thank you," said the detective, quietly.

"But, don't you want your letter?" the clerk demanded, after a pause.

"I'm not looking for any letter."

Just then the detective's man came in, glanced around, and seeing Daniels, advanced to where he stood.

Daniels explained the case to him, gave him instructions, and said that he would come back to the post himself in two hours. Turning then to the clerk, he said:

"I'll put your mind at ease, my friend. I am Duke Daniels. My assistant here will keep my place for a while. We are looking for a man, that is all."

With that he went away, and the clerk, surprised though he was, felt easier for having the enigma solved.

It was after seven o'clock when Duke Daniels returned, and he found his assistant where he had left him.

Their man had not put in an appearance.

Daniels relieved his assistant and took up the watch himself, and the clerk at the window observed:

"Your man is slow in coming, sir."

"Yes, so he is," the detective agreed. "By the way," he asked, "have you a letter there for one Max Barrows?"

The clerk looked, and— Yes, he had.

"Good," commented the detective; "he is the man I want to see."

It was about eight o'clock when a slim, callow and sallow youth of eighteen entered the office.

The detective noted him at once. He had noted all who had come and gone. He had no idea, however, that this would prove to be the person for whom he waited.

When, therefore, the young man stepped to the window and asked for a letter for Max Barrows, Daniels was surprised.

"Where do you expect a letter from?" the delivery-clerk asked.

"It's a city letter," was the answer.

"Yes, here it is."

The letter was handed out, and the clerk looked to see the detective lay a heavy hand upon the young man and arrest him. But, nothing of the sort took place. The youth put the letter into a pocket and went out, and, after a moment, the detective leisurely followed, leaving the clerk looking after him with an expression of disappointment upon his face.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY GROWING DEEPER.

DUKE DANIELS could not make himself believe that this youth was the person who had made the demand of money from Mrs. Russellford.

What possible claim could he have upon her? No, he reasoned, it is some chap whom the real Max Barrows has sent to get his letter for him.

It could not rest at that, however. He must know the truth of the matter.

When the young man had gone a little distance from the post-office, the detective caught up with him, and touching him on the shoulder, said:

"Are you Mr. Max Barrows, sir?"

The young man gave a violent nervous start, and looked around pale and affrighted.

"Y—yes, sir," he answered.

"I was not quite sure," the detective pursued. "I want to have a little talk with you."

"Who are you?" the youth demanded.

"Well, it don't much matter who I am," was the rejoinder; "I have come to see you from Mrs. Russellford."

"Oh! that is it, eh?"

"Exactly."

"And how did you know me?"

"I heard you ask for the letter she sent you this afternoon."

"Oh! I see. Well, what is the word?"

"This is hardly the place to talk," said the detective. "Can't we go somewhere where we can have a quiet chat? Haven't you a room near by?"

"Yes, I have a room, but it may not suit your taste. We will go there, however, if you say so."

"Yes, let's go there."

"All right, come along. It ain't far off."

Then the young man led the way, and presently stopped at the door of a third-rate boarding-house of the neighborhood. Mounting the steps with lively tread, he opened the door and they entered.

It was not by any means an inviting place, and an unsavory kitchen odor, mingled with that of bad tobacco, pervaded the air.

"It isn't a very tony place," the young man apologized, "but I have been down on my luck lately, and it is the best I can afford. Come on up-stairs."

The detective followed him to the top floor, where he was conducted into a small and meanly furnished room. Lighting the gas, the young man set out his only chair to his visitor, seating himself upon the bed.

"Here we are, sir," he announced, "and here we can talk free. Don't look around too much, and you won't see what a miserable hole it is. Now, what is the word from Mrs. Russellford?"

"Read your letter first," said the detective, "and see what she has to say to you in that."

"I prefer to read that when I'm alone, sir."

Daniels smiled.

"Don't be alarmed," he reassured, "for I don't want to rob you. I know there is money in it, but I don't want any of it. Couldn't I have taken it out of the office if I had any such design as that? Don't let my presence trouble you in that line, my young friend."

This gave the youth confidence in the stranger. He realized that what he said was true about his opportunity for taking the letter out of the office as his own had he wanted to do so.

He had to smile, too.

"I see you know all about it," he observed, "and that is proof enough that you are straight. I'll read it."

Taking the letter from his pocket, he opened it and drew out its contents—a folded sheet of paper with several bank-notes folded in it.

Counting the notes as he took them out, a cloud appeared upon the young man's face.

"She ain't sent me as much as I asked for," he growled.

"How much has she sent?" asked Daniels.

"Only forty dollars, and I asked for a hundred."

"Well, see what she says in the letter."

The young man read it.

"What great trouble is she in?" he asked.

"Does she say she is in trouble?"

"Yes."

Daniels saw that the youth was innocent of all knowledge concerning the lost child. He could read the young man, and knew that he was not deep enough for such acting as the opposite view called for.

"She has lost her child," he said.

"What! her little girl dead!" the young man exclaimed.

That settled the point, if further proof had been wanting. Max Barrows knew nothing of what had taken place at the Russellford residence.

"No, she is not dead, at least we hope she isn't," the detective explained; "but she has disappeared suddenly, and no one knows where she is."

"That is strange, mighty strange," the young man mused.

"Let me see the letter," the detective requested, holding out his hand for it; "how does she express herself?"

It was not a request, but a matter-of-fact demand, that he made, and the letter was handed over to him without a word or even a sign of hesitancy.

It ran as follows:

"MAX BARROWS:—

"Your note at hand. I send you all the money I have; I can do no more. If you only knew the great trouble I am in, I am sure you would not worry me for money at this time. Why don't you go away, be a man and be independent? You positively must not come here, and I beg of you not to make anything known to my husband. I will give you more money when I can, but you must not demand it too often."

Mrs. R."

"You have not read the papers lately," the detective observed, as he folded the note and handed it back. "If you had you would have seen the account of the mysterious disappearance of the child."

"No, I haven't looked at a paper in a week," the young man confessed.

"That accounts for your not knowing anything about it, then. By the way, the lady is very anxious for you not to see her husband. Of

course she does not want a certain little secret to come to his ears."

As he said this the detective gave a knowing wink, as though to imply that he knew all about it.

"No, she is very sensitive about it, and that is what I am working her on, you see. She has told you about it, has she?"

"I couldn't very well know it if she hadn't, could I?" was the evasive reply. "If she told me anything she might as well tell me all, you know. I couldn't be of much service to her if she didn't let me into the facts of the case."

"No, I'd reckon not. But, you said you had come here from her. What do you want with me?"

"Well, in the first place you are not to write to her any more. It is not safe work, you know. Then, next, you are not to go near the house under any circumstances. If you want to communicate with her, you are to do it through me."

"Humph!" the young man grunted. "It strikes me that she is drawing the line pretty narrow."

"You have no idea how nervous she is, and what worry you have caused her. I really think you had better let up a little. I will give you my name and address, however, and if you really insist upon calling upon her further, just drop a line to me, and I will deliver your word to her."

"She didn't say anything about it in the note," observed the youth, suspiciously.

The detective was not getting ahead. What he wanted was to learn what hold this young man had upon Mrs. Russelford. He was quick to see that the youth was getting wary.

"You do not seem to understand what a state of mind she is in," he said. "I wonder that she wrote as well as she did. She is almost crazed over the loss of her little girl. By the way," changing quickly, "can you give a guess as to who could have had any object in stealing the child?"

"No, sir, I can't," was the answer. "I don't know much about the family, to tell the truth."

"You know enough about them, though, to draw heavily upon the lady for money, whatever else you don't know," with another wink.

The young man laughed.

"That is a different matter," he said. "You know how that is. Why, I have never seen the woman, sir."

The detective was decidedly puzzled. How was he to get at the truth of the matter?

"Never seen her?" he repeated.

"No, sir, never seen her, although she is—But, if she has told you about it, there is no need for me to repeat it."

"I begin to surmise that she hasn't told me the straight facts," remarked the detective. "Go ahead and give me your version of it, and I will compare them."

"Well, hardly," the young man drawled. "If she has told you all, you know it all; if she hasn't then it is plain that she don't want you to know any more than she has told you. You don't get anything more out of me."

Daniels was surprised in more ways than one. The youth was showing more keenness than he had given him credit for.

"Oh, well, it don't particularly matter," he declared. "The main thing is, will you comply with her request? She will be more at ease when she has fixed some safe way of communicating with you, you know."

"Why, yes, I am willing to comply with her request. It don't particularly matter how I get at her pocketbook, so long as I do."

"I thought not. Well, here," penciling a name and address on a card, "when you have anything to say to her, just write it to me."

"All right, I will; but if I don't hear from you or her in short order, then I'll write to her direct again."

"Oh, it will be all right. Manage to give me a day or two, however, for I may not be able to attend to it in an hour, and may not find the lady at home. And there is one more thing."

"What is that?"

"Keep me posted as to your whereabouts. The lady may want to do something more for you soon."

"Yes, I'll do that; and I was going to say: Tell her that forty dollars isn't a hundred, and that I want the rest of it."

"I will see to that."

The detective took his leave. He had not gained his object; but, then, he had not pushed very hard to gain it. He had laid plans for the future, however, for he had now struck a clew.

CHAPTER VII.

A SPLIT IN THE FAMILY.

WHEN his visitor was gone, Max Barrows sat for some time in thoughtful silence.

"This is altogether a new deal, this is," he mused. "I don't rightly understand it, but I s'pose it's all right. She's got skittish about her husband's findin' it out, and wants to take care that he don't. It's too bad about her young one, and that's a fact."

"Now, I don't just like the idea of doing business through a middle-man, but I suppose I'll

have to do it. I don't want to be too hard on the woman. It strikes me that this Mr. What's-his-name—glancing at the card—"that this Mr. John Daws is a lawyer, or something in that line. I hate to deal with him, for I don't like his eyes, as they make me feel that he knows what I'm thinking."

So his musings ran on, changing from point to point.

Presently he took the money out of his pocket and counted it over again. As he did this he seemed to fondle it, as though he had a particular liking for it aside from its usefulness.

"Only forty dollars, eh?" he muttered. "Well, that's better than nothing, I suppose. Now, what is dad's share to be? About so much, I guess," taking a five-dollar-bill out and laying it aside, "and the rest for me."

Rolling the money up, he wadded it into a pocket, putting the separated five into another pocket by itself.

After that he took up the letter, and now read it over more carefully than he had at first done.

"Why don't I go away, be a man and be independent, eh?" he quoted from it in a transposing way.

"Well," he thoughtfully answered, "mainly because it ain't in me, I s'pose. And then, how can a feller be anything with a mill-stone around his neck? It seems to me that Fate has dealt out a double bitter portion to me."

This was said in a manner that was bitter enough, certainly.

"I have tried that, tried it as hard as any feller ever did," he mused, "but, it has been a failure every time. Two really good positions I have had, and that mill-stone has dragged me down and out of both of them. I haven't tried the going away part of it, though, that's true. I wonder how it would work?"

Again he fell into a reverie.

He did not come out of it until he was aroused by a knock at the door.

Thrusting the letter into his pocket, he got up and opened the door and a remarkable-looking visitor entered.

The person was a genuine type of the genus "bum." He had on a remnant of a hat, to begin at the top, and that without any brim. All around the hat was a mat of tangled hair that had evidently never felt the controlling influence of a comb. Then came a pair of pale, weak and watery eyes, and a nose that was colored and seeded till it had the appearance of a ripe strawberry. Below that was a vista of tatters and rags that terminated finally in a pair of rough, heavy, large and much-worn boots.

His face, to return to that, was covered with a stubble of beard of about a month's growth.

"Good-evenin', my son," he greeted, in a voice that was something between a squeal and a whistle; "how do I find you?"

"Oh, I am all right, I guess," was the answer.

The response was not given in a very cordial tone, and kicking the one chair of the room out toward the caller, the young man threw himself upon the bed.

The hard-looking customer dropped down upon the chair, took off his apology of a hat and dropped it beside him, and stretching out his legs, asked:

"Well, son, has our lady been heard from?"

Having now a better look at the fellow, as his hat was off, he appeared to be between forty and fifty years of age. He was so rum-worn, however, that he might have been younger than he looked.

"Yes, I have heard from her," the young man answered.

"And what does she say? Does she send any rocks?"

"Yes, she sent a little, but she kicks against sending it. Your share don't amount to much this time."

"How much?"

"Five dollars. Here it is, make the most of it. It is the last we are likely to get for a time."

"Five dollars! Why, that is a fortune to me, son. Five for me and five for you; why, that is what I call liberal, boy."

"She used to send ten."

"Well, that's so; but times change, and mebbe it's th' same with her. While she drops a fiver into my hand once in a while, I sha'n't kick."

"All right, but make the most of it."

"So you said afore, an' also that it is th' last we are likely to get for a time. What do you mean by that?"

"I meant what I said. The lady has had trouble—is in trouble yet, and she is likely to sicken and die, or go mad."

"What in all creation are you drivin' at?"

"Well, her little girl has been stolen from her, and the child can't be found anywhere. It is a mystery that is puzzlin' th' police out of their wits."

"Th' dickens you say? Who told you?"

"Her lawyer; he was here to-night."

"Her lawyer! Did you say her lawyer?"

"That's what I said."

The hard case sat up straight, and his face wore a troubled look.

"What was her lawyer doin' here?" he demanded.

"He came to see me. She won't deal with us direct any more, and all that I get I have to ask the lawyer for."

"That knocks it in the head, then. You must move and get out of this hole, my boy. That lawyer mustn't know where to find you. I—I guess I won't stay very long to-night, my son; I have got a 'gagement that must not—"

"There, now, don't get scared before you are hurt," the young man admonished. "He isn't coming back here to-night. What have you got to be afraid of, anyhow?"

"Well, er, nothin'; but my 'pearance, boy, my 'pearance."

"It is your own fault that your appearance isn't better than it is. Where is the coat that I gave you only two weeks ago?"

"My uncle has it," was the confession, and the drunkard laughed as though he had uttered something funny.

"Well, you had ought to be ashamed of yourself. It is the last piece of clothing that you will get out of me, and you can make up your mind to that."

The hard customer looked surprised.

"What has come over you, son?" he asked. "You wouldn't see your father go naked, would you? What is a man to do? Times never was harder, and it takes money to buy whisky. You know that I can't live without whisky."

"I have almost come to the pass that I hardly care whether you live or die."

The words were uttered in a tone of bitter despair.

The drunkard sat up straighter than ever, a half-frightened look came over his face, and he stared at the youth for some moments without speaking.

When he did speak it was to voice a quotation that had the sound of mockery, coming from him.

"Honor thy father and mother," he squeaked. "Do you hear what I say, son? Honor thy father and mother. I am your father, boy, and it is your duty to honor me."

"What is there about you to honor?" the young man demanded sullenly.

"What is there about me to honor? Well, dast your imperdence, anyhow! What is there about me to honor? Ain't I the being of your author—I mean th' author of your bein'? Ain't that reason enough why you should honor me? And as fer my 'pearance bein' as it is, why don't you see to it that I don't need to look so?"

"You had a coat only—"

"Yas, I had a coat, but a coat ain't everything, is it? What if I did have a coat? Was that a vest, and trowsers, and hat, and boots, and money in my pocket? I reckon it wasn't!"

"If I had been able to give you all you mention, they would have been where the coat is now," the young man complained.

"That might be, unless you had lined my pocket at the same time. What is there about me to honor! Well, that takes my time. Why, you young upstart, I am a gentleman, I am, and your betters any day. See here, just see here, and I'll show you something that—"

"Never mind, I don't want to see it," was the interruption.

The hard-looking customer was fumbling in an inside pocket of his coat for something.

"No, I reckon you don't," he whistled, "but I'll show it to you none the less, fer it will do ye good ter let ye see how ye have lost th' blue blood that order be in yer veins. There, jest gaze on that!"

He had brought a small flat package from his pocket, and unwound the many papers that composed its wrappings, and from between two pieces of card-board now brought forth a photograph.

"Jest gaze on that, you puny rat, you!" he repeated, thrusting it forward into the young man's face. "That was me, that was; me. Do you understand? That was me when I was twenty."

If the man spoke the truth, he had sadly degenerated since then.

The photograph was that of a handsome young man, dark-complexioned, with big black eyes and curly black hair.

"Put it away," the young man growled, "I don't want to see it. If it really represents what you were at the age of twenty, the change in you now is all the more disgusting."

"W-what!" the drunkard cried, as he proceeded to wrap the photograph up, "do you dare to talk that way to me? You want to remember that you ain't of age yet, my rooster."

"I am old enough to know what I am doing, though," was the retort, "and now I have made up my mind that we must part."

"W-w-what!"

This time it was only a gasp. It lacked fullness of breath to make it even a whistle.

"I mean what I say. You have got the last help from me that you will ever get. Instead of trying to reform, you are sinking lower and lower. You have been the means of my losing two or three good situations, by your hanging around me, and now I cast you off. As soon as I can find a situation I shall get out of here, and

the chances are that you will never hear from me again."

There was more spirit in the youth than his appearance indicated. The worm was turning at last. The wretched bummer could hardly believe that he heard aright.

"Y-you talk ter me like that!" he tried to shout, but making only a sound like escaping steam. "I—I—I'll wring your skinny neck fer you, see 'f I don't."

He started up to put his threat into execution.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOUNCING THE BUMMERS.

THE bummer had not the strength to carry his threat into effect.

Alcohol had long since deprived him of muscular power, and springing up to meet his attack, Max caught hold of him and laid him upon the floor as easily as though he had been a bag of rags.

The youth was not by any means strong, but he was strong enough for that.

"No you don't," he cried. "The time has been when you could club me about as you pleased, but that time is past. You won't never do it again."

"W-would you strike the bein' of your author—I mean th' author of your bein'!" the man gasped.

"I have no intention of striking you," Max answered. "You want to keep your hands off of me, though."

"Well, let me up."

"Will ye set down and keep quiet?"

"Y-yes; well do that as whollop ye, I s'pose. We'll have a talk."

"All right, get up and sit down there, then."

Max got up and allowed his unworthy parent to do the same.

The bummer rolled over, got upon his hands and knees first, and then with the help of the chair finally got upon his feet and sat down.

"You have growed strong," he observed, essaying to brush the dust from his patches, as though he could have gathered any from the floor. It would have been more reasonable to have looked for the contamination *vice versa*.

"It isn't so much that I have grown strong," said Max, "as it is that you have grown weak. You have allowed rum to sap all the strength you ever had."

"You couldn't 'a' done that twenty years ago, my boy; no, nor twenty just like you couldn't 'a' done it. I was a terror in them days, and didn't ax no odds o' no man."

"See what you have come to, then. But, you wanted to talk; what do you want to say? I meant what I said about cutting loose from you."

"Y-you don't mean that, lad, do ye?"

"I certainly do. Just listen to this," and taking the letter from his pocket he read it aloud, omitting, of course, to name the true amount of money it had contained.

"Well, what of it?" the drunkard asked, when Max had finished.

"What of it? Enough. She makes me half ashamed of myself, that's what. She asks me why I don't be a man, and be independent."

"He, he, he!" the old rum-soak chuckled, "that's purty good, that is. Why it ain't necessary fer you ter be any more independent than ye are, with her ter fall back on."

"That is just it. I don't want to trouble her any more than I can't help, in th' future. I want to be independent, just as she says."

The eyes of the other opened wide.

"Hev ye been ter Sunday school?" he inquired. "Be ye goin' ter be an angel right away? Anybody would think so, ter hear ye talk. I didn't think ye was sich a fool, Max Barrows."

"It strikes me that I have been a fool long enough."

"Well, what is ter become o' me?" the drunkard asked, in deep concern.

"Any one can see what you are comin' to, about as fast as you can," was the response.

"An' what is that?"

"Your grave."

There was an awkward pause, during which the bummer looked considerably troubled for some moments. He soon brightened up, however, and passed it off with a laugh.

"You make a mistook there," he declared. "Whisky can't never down me. I can hold more of it than any other man on two feet. Why, it is what I live on. But, say, you ain't really goin' ter be so foolish as ter throw away our bread and butter in this way—"

"You have heard what I said, and I mean it."

"But, boy, I'll starve. This is th' thanks I git, is it, fer my keer of you an' my bringin' of ye up. Who was it brung ye up? Who was it that told ye th' secret ye know, and put ye on th' track so ye could draw money whenever ye felt like it?"

"I won't take the secret with me; you will still have that, if it is of any use to you. If you are not ashamed of it, I am."

"But I can't do nothin' with it without you."

"You can go to her lawyer and state your case to him."

The man had forgotten the mention of the lawyer. He looked frightened again. He

reached for his hat as though he would go at once—but not to him.

A knock at the door at that moment caused him to start, grab up his hat and put it on.

"Come in," called Max.

The door opened, and another wretched-looking specimen of humanity entered. He was almost a counterpart of the first.

"Why, if it ain't my pard, Dob Ritters!" the first-comer exclaimed.

"And if it ain't my old mate, Job Barrows!" cried the new-comer.

The two bummers rushed together, then clasped hands warmly.

To witness their greeting, one would naturally have thought that they had not seen each other in a long time.

Such was not the case. They had parted within the hour. They were inseparable companions. Such was their way of greeting whenever they met after having been apart, be the time longer or shorter.

Max had never been friendly toward Ritters, had never invited him up to his room when his father had occasion to visit him, and this was the first time that the fellow had ventured to come.

"Who asked you to come up here?" Max demanded, as soon as the customary greeting was over.

"Well, nobody," answered Dob, "but me an' yer dad is twins, almost, youngster, an' where one is there it is proper fer th' other ter be likewise and also. That is th' reason that I have ventured to come."

While he was saying this, the fellow closed the door and placed his back against it.

"This is my room," protested the youth, "and it is for me to say who shall come into it. You had better take yourself off again."

"Don't be too hard, Max, boy," put in his fond parent, "Dob an' me is like to chicks o' th' same brood, an' we hates to be parted. I'm goin' soon myself, an' then we'll both be gone."

"The sooner the better."

"See how he speaks to me, th' bein'—I mean th' author of his bein'," said Job, calling his boon companion's attention.

"What is th' meanin' of it?" asked Dob.

"It means a split in th' fambly, as near as I kin come at it," explained Job. "He means ter cast me off."

"Cast ye off! These things must never be. That hits me too. Rash youth, what meanest thee?"

"I have nothing to say to you about it," snapped Max.

"Mebby not, but I have somethin' ter say ter you. You must honor thy father and mother, as I have heard yer dad say many a time. Would you bring his gray hairs in sorrow ter th' grave?"

"If you have anything further to say to me," exclaimed Max, turning to Job, "say it, and then both of you be off."

Once having asserted his independence, the young man felt as though he had grown an inch. The cutting rebuke from Mrs. Russellford had roused what spirit there was in him, though whether it would be lasting or not remained to be seen.

"You see how he talks ter me, th' bein'—I mean— But, you see fer yerself," Job complained. "This is his ongrateful return fer all I've done fer him."

"Yes, I see. Rash youth, fer shame! But, Job, did th' woman send any of th' necessary of life this time?"

"Yes, a fiver is my share."

"That interests me, too. What's yours is mine."

"Yes, and what's mine is yours," returned Job. "Th' lad has got his share in his pocket, Dob."

"An' his is another fiver."

"Exactly."

"And he means ter turn you off, which interests me, too."

"You heard what he said, Dob."

"Then, by rights, don't that other fiver belong ter me, Job?"

"By rights it does," Job agreed.

Max saw through their little game. It had been their intention to take his money away from him anyhow. It was for that purpose that Dob had come up. It had all been arranged between them.

He felt great concern, as well he might. With both of them against him, it was likely that they would overcome him.

"Get out of here, both of you!" he ordered.

"Not so fast, Maxey," responded his fond parent. "You have turned me off, but you shan't rob me an' my pardner of our rights. Shell out that money, an' then we'll go right off."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," cried the frightened youth. "Don't you dare to come near me!"

"Dob, ain't that money oun?"

"By rights it is, Job."

"Then let's take it."

"That's what we will."

They moved forward together, and the young man braced himself to meet their attack.

The room was small, and barely two steps

separated them anyhow, so there was but little ground to cover.

As soon as the first step was taken, Max raised his foot and planted it against the stomach of Dob, knocking the wind out of him for the time being and driving him back against the wall, and then father and son grappled for the mastery.

This time Job showed more strength, and they fell to the floor together, the youth underneath. But he did not long remain there. Bringing all the strength to his aid that he could command, he managed to throw Job off, break away from him and get up.

By that time Dob was getting ready to take a hand in again. He kept between Max and the door, so that the lad might not escape them. Seeing that he was cornered, Max called for help.

The noise had already drawn attention, other boarders came running to the scene, and as soon as Max had stated his case they all fell upon the two bummers and fired them down-stairs and out of the house.

On the floor of the room, during the struggle, Job Barrows had lost his cherished photograph and also another package as carefully wrapped.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER MYSTERY ADDED.

IT was a sad evening in the Russellford home. Mrs. Russellford's grief was all too genuine, and she refused to be comforted. As for Mr. Russellford, it was all that he could do to bear up under his sorrow.

That harrowing question, Where was their child? had not been answered.

As the evening advanced Mrs. Russellford grew violently hysterical, and the family physician was sent for.

When he arrived he administered a quieting powder, directing that as soon as its effects were seen the lady should be induced to retire. He also prescribed for Mr. Russellford, seeing that he was scarcely less nervous and depressed than his wife.

Mrs. Russellford grew gradually quiet after the medicine had been given, and about an hour later retired.

It was then about ten o'clock.

Just before retiring, Mrs. Russellford had insisted upon her husband's making the usual search of the apartment, to make sure that no one was anywhere concealed.

This was done to gratify her, and her mind was made easy on that score.

Mr. Russellford had shared his wife's room since the terrible affliction had come upon them, and when she fell asleep he seated himself in a rocking-chair and gave himself up to thought.

He knew that it would be useless for him to go to bed before feeling completely sleepy.

The doors of the room had been locked and bolted.

His thoughts were sad enough, as can be imagined, and that unanswered question was maddening. Where was his child? What fate had she met? And it was all the more terrible to feel how utterly helpless he was to do anything toward solving the mystery.

For a long time he sat thus, thinking, thinking. But finally his thoughts began to wander, vague fancies framed themselves in his mind, they in turn passed into dreams, and at last he slept soundly.

When he awoke it was with a start. It was broad daylight, and some one was knocking at the door.

"Who is there?" he asked, only half awake yet.

"It is your breakfast hour, sir, and I thought I would call you," the voice of a servant answered.

"Oh, all right," he responded; "we will be down presently."

A glance at his watch showed him that it was after eight o'clock.

It was with some surprise that he found that he had slept in the chair all night, but the recollection of the medicine the doctor had given him explained that immediately to his satisfaction.

Getting up, he looked toward the bed to see if his wife was still sleeping.

To his surprise, she was gone.

This brought him wide awake in an instant, if he had not been so before. The awful recollection of his child's disappearance rushed upon him. Had that mystery been repeated? But no, of course not. She was simply in the bath-room, or perhaps in the sitting-room beyond.

Filled with a strange alarm, nevertheless, he hastened to look in those two rooms.

He had already looked at the door leading into the hall, and it was locked and bolted just as he had left it.

Throwing open the door of the bath-room, which was partly closed, he looked in. His wife was not there, and the door leading into the sitting-room was locked and bolted the same as the other.

With a great throb of fear and dismay his heart almost stood still. He felt cold to the bone, a dew of perspiration broke out upon him, his head grew dizzy and he had to grasp the frame of the door to keep from falling.

It was some moments before he recovered strength to investigate further.

What did it mean? What horrible mystery was around him and his household? What had been the fate of his wife and child?

He went to the windows and examined them. The wire netting on the outside was in perfect order, proof positive that no person had entered or left the room in that manner.

Next he took a closer look at the doors. Both were positively locked and bolted. Not only that, but the button of each bolt was down into its niche, showing beyond doubt that neither of the doors had been opened during the night.

The distracted husband and father sunk down upon a chair and groaned aloud. It was more than he could bear. Covering his face with his hands he gave way to his grief, and great sobs shook his frame.

This lasted for some time.

Finally the outburst had spent its force, and he got up, dashing the tears from his eyes.

Was it possible that his wife was not in the room? How had she been taken out—or gone out? He began a search, and shortly made another discovery. All of his wife's clothing was missing!

"My God! what can this mean?" he gasped in anguish.

It is impossible to comprehend what his acute suffering of mind must have been.

There was the bed with the imprint where the loved form had so lately lain. The perfume of her hair was still upon the pillow. The coverings were thrown lightly back, just as they would naturally have been left by a person getting up.

He looked all around the room, hoping against hope that he might find something that would throw some light upon the terrible enigma. But he found nothing.

At last he threw open the door and called for the servants.

One of them quickly responded.

At sight of his face, so deathlike and full of woe, the girl stopped short, her own face grew pale, and she faintly asked:

"What is it, sir?"

"Your mistress—"

"She is not dead? Oh, sir, do not say that she is dead!"

As she interrupted with the hurried words, the girl took a step forward as though to rush into the room.

"She is gone," Mr. Russelford groaned.

"Gone!"

"Yes, gone—gone as mysteriously as little Eulalie went. Put on your things with all the haste you can and run around to the police station and tell the sergeant about it, and tell him to send men here immediately."

"Yes, sir."

Down stairs the girl flew, made known to the other servants the appalling discovery, and lost no time in setting out upon her errand.

In a brief time detectives were again upon the scene, a hundred and one questions were put to Mr. Russelford, and that was all it amounted

The were utterly baffled.

As soon as they were gone, Mr. Russelford set out for the office of his private detective, Duke Daniels.

When he reached there it was about half-past nine, and the detective was in. Staggering into the office, he dropped into a chair in a listless—almost lifeless—manner.

The detective was quick to see that something terrible had happened.

"My dear sir, what is the matter?" he asked.

"My—my wife—"

"I trust that her reason has not given way, and sincerely hope—Heavens, sir, you make me think the worst! What is it?"

"She is missing in the same mysterious manner."

"What?"

Nothing could have brought out an exclamation of greater surprise.

"I say that she is gone, sir," Mr. Russelford confirmed. "It is the same mystery repeated."

"That she, too, has disappeared out of a closet and locked room?"

"Exactly."

"You surprise me beyond measure. Give me the facts of the case as briefly as you can, sir."

"It is soon told. She was very hysterical last evening, and sent for our physician. He came, and he prescribed for both of us, giving us something to produce quiet and sleep. I have been occupying my wife's room with her since the disappearance of our child. After my wife had gone to bed and was asleep, I remained sitting in the rocking-chair, thinking. I fell asleep there. I did not wake up until eight o'clock, when a servant called me. Then I discovered that my wife was gone, but the doors were still fastened just as I had left them."

"Wonderful! I never heard of anything like it!" the detective exclaimed. "I will go back with you immediately. You have told the police?"

"Yes, and they have been there, but they are puzzled."

"I do not wonder at that."

In a few minutes the detective had finished the note he had been writing, and putting on his hat and coat, set out with Mr. Russelford to go to the house.

"There is something back of this," the detective remarked, as they walked along, "and something that must be brought to light. What it is I cannot guess."

"To me it is all a horrible riddle," said Mr. Russelford. "I can think of nothing that will in any way throw light upon it."

"And about the greatest part of the mystery is, how did the child and your wife get out of that room?"

"It is impossible to imagine."

"You found no clew this morning when you found that your wife was gone?"

"Nothing whatever, sir. I looked well around, hoping that I might find something."

"Was any of your wife's clothing taken?"

"That is another strange part of it, sir. All her clothing is gone."

"Oh, ho! that is the case, is it?"

"Yes; but why do you speak in that tone? Have you hit upon a clew, or an idea that promises something?"

"One more question first, Mr. Russelford: Is any of the child's clothing missing?"

Mr. Russelford stopped short, his face took on a frightened expression, and he answered:

"Heavens! I did not think of that! Now that I reflect, sir, I believe that the child's clothing is gone, too."

"I thought so," the detective commented.

"We will talk further of this when we reach the house. For the present let me think."

They walked on in silence, each occupied with his thoughts. Mr. Russelford's mind was filled with vague and terrible doubts and fears. The detective's was full of dark and dismal suspicions.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER WARNING.

WHEN they arrived at the house Mr. Russelford led the way immediately to the room with which the mystery was associated.

The detective closed the door, while Mr. Russelford went immediately to one of the closets.

"Yes," the latter announced, as he glanced into the closet, "it is as I thought; the child's clothes are gone."

"And what does this lead you to think?" asked the detective.

"I do not know," was the answer.

"It creates no suspicion in your mind?"

"I know not what you mean. It fills my mind with a hundred vague suppositions, not one of which I can follow out and analyze."

"Does it suggest the thought that your wife may have gone away of her own choice?"

Mr. Russelford started as though stung, and his face flushed painfully.

"You must pardon my bluntness, Mr. Russelford," the detective supplemented, "but this thing has got to be looked squarely in the face. Did that thought come to you?"

"I have been trying to ask myself if such a thing is possible," was the slow answer.

"And what conclusion have you reached?"

"I do not think that such is the case. I can find no reason, not the slightest, that she can have had for such a step. No, I do not believe that of her."

"You must admit that there is ground for suspicion in that direction."

"I am not willing to do so."

"Willing or not, the fact remains. Let me picture it to you as I see it. I have no grounds to support my theory, however. For some reason known only to herself, your wife resolved to leave you. She first got the child away. Next, she went herself, taking her clothes and the child's."

"No, no, I can not believe that. Think of her grief; was that not real enough?"

"I admit that, but she may have had some other sorrow on her mind."

"I will not believe it, sir. Would she have taken willingly the sleeping potion the doctor prescribed? And, then, how did she get out of the room?"

"Your point is a good one. As to how she got out of the room, I intend to investigate that further. Your argument, then, seems to point to the belief that your wife and child were taken from the room by some person unknown."

"I can think of no other way of explaining it, sir."

"Very well. Now, are you able yet to point suspicion at any person?"

"I am not. I am as much in the dark as I was at first."

"Who is Max Barrows?"

The detective put the name suddenly, and watched to note the effect.

"Who is who, sir?" Mr. Russelford asked innocently enough.

The detective repeated.

"I never heard the name before in my life, sir."

"It was well known to your wife."

"The name Max Barrows was well known to my wife?"

"Yes, sir. She has corresponded with him. Do you remember that letter that came for your wife yesterday? That was from him."

"You astound me, sir. You will have to prove what you say."

"Perhaps I can do that. Your wife has a small lap writing-desk, has she not?"

"Yes, she has such a desk."

"Will you allow me to see it?"

"Certainly. Come into the back room."

They went into the rear sitting-room, and Mr. Russelford brought the desk out of a closet.

"That is it," he said.

"Yes, that is the one I mean," agreed the detective. "I think you will find the letter in that, sir."

"It is locked, and I have not the key."

"I can open it easily enough."

"Go ahead."

The detective opened the desk in the same manner in which he had opened it on the previous occasion, and there was the letter. He was afraid that the woman had destroyed it.

"Here it is, sir," he said; "read it."

Mr. Russelford took the letter and read it, and as he read his hand trembled and his face grew white.

"What do you think of that, sir?" Daniels asked.

The gentleman had sunk down upon a chair, completely overcome.

"I do not know what to think!" he gasped in return.

"You see, sir, this Max Barrows has some hold upon your wife, and has demanded money of her. You see what his threat is; if she don't comply he will call on you. It is something that she would not have you know. The question is, has this had anything to do with her disappearance?"

Mr. Russelford sat like one dazed, staring at the letter and yet hardly seeing it.

"I wonder if she answered it," he spoke, more to himself than to the detective.

To answer that the detective took up the blotter, called his attention to the ink-stains upon it, and told him to look at them in the glass.

This was done, and Mr. Russelford sunk down upon his chair again with a groan.

"I cannot believe the evidence of my own eyes," he muttered. "It cannot be true. Why, sir, she is as pure as an angel. There cannot be anything in all this."

"I hope there is not, sir, but I am presenting facts. You see the letter she received, and I have shown you that she answered it."

"I wish we could know what that answer was."

"I have seen it, sir."

"You! You have seen it?"

"Yes, sir. I can tell you what was in it, though perhaps not word for word. Shall I do so?"

"Yes, yes, let me know all."

"Well, she inclosed forty dollars to this Max Barrows, telling him that it was all she had and that she could do no more. She told him that he positively must not come here, and that he must not let anything become known to you. She promised to send him more when she could."

Mr. Russelford's distress was pitiable.

"This seems like some horrible dream," he said. "I cannot realize that it is true. I cherished that woman as I did my life, and she seemed all purity and goodness. And she was! There is some foul work here that she is not guilty of. She is innocent, and I will not believe her otherwise!"

"That is a noble sentiment, sir, and I admire you for holding that view, for it looks dark enough on the other side. Facts are stubborn things, and here are some of them for our consideration."

"I do not care what the facts are, I shall hold her innocent until I am positively forced to think otherwise. It seems impossible that this trouble could come into our happy home, sir. Why, we were all in all to each other, or seemed to be."

"I sympathize with you, sir, and I hope that the clouds may be cleared away. But the present outlook is dark. You have one bit of consolation, however."

"And what is that?"

"The knowledge that your child is alive."

"How do I know that she is alive? How do you know that she is?"

"Have they any use for clothes for a dead child?"

"Ha! that is so. I did not think of that. Well, it is some satisfaction to be sure on that point. But, heavens! will this awful mystery ever be cleared away?"

"I promise you that I shall do all in my power to clear it up, sir. But, a few questions now. Can you point to any clew in connection with this Max Barrows? Do you know of any such person, or name, in your wife's family anywhere?"

"I do not."

"What can you tell me about your wife's family? What was your wife's maiden name?"

"Her name was Corinne Tetteigh. She was the only child of a widow, when I married her, and her mother is now dead. She has no rela-

tions nearer than uncles and aunts and cousins, and they are in the West."

The detective asked a great many questions in this line, but it is needless to quote them all. What he learned can be summed up in fewer words.

Mr. Russellford had known Miss Tetteigh about two years before marrying her. She had come from the West with her widowed mother, and settled in the city. If there was any secret in her life, it had been kept from him. He could not believe that there was any that was detrimental to her good name.

The detective had enough information to enable him to begin a rigid investigation into the family.

When the detective's questions ended, Mr. Russellford asked:

"How did you know about that letter?"

Daniels explained all that he thought proper.

"As to the answer she sent," he concluded, "and how I came to see that, I hunted up this Max Barrows."

"Ha! you have seen him, then?"

"Yes."

"Who is he and where is he?"

"He is only a youth, about eighteen years old I should think, and rather sallow. He is poor, and is at present stopping in a miserable room down-town. I shall arrange for you to get a look at him soon."

Conversation in that line led to some length.

Finally they returned to the front room, and there the detective set about making a most careful examination. He examined the floors and walls thoroughly, thinking that there might be a secret door somewhere, but he found nothing of the kind.

"It beats any case that I ever had anything to do with," he confessed, when he was through. "I cannot understand how they got out of the room, and yet left the doors locked behind them."

He went to the windows and carefully examined the netting and the frames it was on. It was simply impossible that any one had passed in or out that way.

Finally he went away, leaving Mr. Russellford in a melancholy mood indeed, and returned to his office.

Only a little time later a letter bearing a special stamp was delivered to him, and when he opened it he read:

"MR. DUKE DANIELS, Detective:—

"Sir:—Once more you are warned, and this will be the last time. It is for your own good that I warn you. Don't go any further in the Russellford case. Be wise and heed what I say. You cannot hope to fight against me.

"Yours finally,

"I. C. ALLTHINGS."

CHAPTER XI.

OLD MEMORIES REVIVED.

WHEN Mrs. Russellford awoke, which was when the drug which the doctor had given her had spent its force, she found that the sun was shining into her room.

She looked around, but somehow the room seemed strange.

Where was she? what had happened?

Suddenly the remembrance of her missing child flashed into her mind, and she started up with a cry.

It was a cry that was quickly changed from one of sorrow to one of gladness, however.

There beside her lay her child, sleeping sweetly.

Just then the little one awoke, and seeing her mother, cried:

"Mamma!"

"My darling!" exclaimed the overjoyed mother, and catching the little one to her breast she showered kisses upon her face.

Mrs. Russellford was so overcome that it was some time before she could ask the child any questions.

Presently, after looking around and finding that she was really in a strange house, she asked:

"Where are we, Eulalie?"

"I s'pect we's in heaven, mamma," was the innocent answer.

"Oh, no, I guess we are not there," was the smiling response to that, "but we are certainly not at home. Do you know whose house this is?"

"Oh, yes, it is a real nice lady lives here, and she gives me lots of candy. I knowed you was comin', mamma."

"You did? How did you know?"

"The lady told me."

Mrs. Russellford was thoughtful.

"Do know who brought you here?" she presently asked.

"No; I waked up and here I was. That's what made me fink it must be heaven. Be you quite sure it isn't heaven, mamma?"

"Yes, I am quite sure it isn't, dear. You have been lost, and we could not find you. We have been almost crazed about you, and— But, good heavens! am I missing in the same manner? What can your papa think?"

"Maybe the lady will bring him here, too, mamma," the little one suggested.

"No, no, that is not to be thought of," Mrs. Russellford answered to herself. "What is the meaning of all this? Where am I? Who can have brought me here? What was I brought here for?"

Getting out of the bed, she looked around the apartment.

It was a large and handsomely furnished bedroom, and in a convenient place she saw her clothes and the child's.

She proceeded to dress herself forthwith, and then dressed Eulalie.

That done, she went to the door with the intention of going out, but to her dismay she found the doors locked.

"We are prisoners!" she exclaimed in a terrified manner.

Just then a step was heard without, the key turned in the lock, the door opened and a woman entered the room.

"Good-morning," she saluted. "I am glad to see you up and looking so well. Will you have your breakfast brought up now?"

"Where am I?" Mrs. Russellford demanded.

"I am not permitted to tell you anything, madam," was the respectful answer, "so it will be useless for you to ask any questions."

"But, whose house am I in? and who brought me here?"

"I cannot answer, madam."

"You must—you shall answer me!"

"There, now, pray do not excite yourself, for I tell you plainly that I can give you no information whatever. If you are sensible you will take things easy. You are to have everything that you wish; all you have to do is to ask for it."

"Then I will have my liberty, and that immediately."

"You know that I did not mean that."

"That is the only thing that I want now."

"I meant things to eat, and to read, and the like. Come, you had better let me bring your breakfast. What will you have?"

"I will have nothing. I will eat nothing. You shall let me go, and that soon."

"I hope you will not act so, madam. I want to do everything I can for you, and will be your friend if you will only let me. Surely you will not oblige the dear little child to go hungry."

"Me is very hungry," put in Eulalie, demurely.

With a glance at the child Mrs. Russellford relented.

"You may bring our breakfast up," she said.

"That is more sensible," commented the woman. "You have been brought here so that you could be with your child, and if you will only take things easy you can be happy. What shall I bring you?"

"Oh, anything; I do not care what."

"Very well."

The woman went out, locking the door after her, and Mrs. Russellford catching her child to her breast sunk weeping upon a chair.

"What is the matter with you, mamma?" asked the child. "Why does you cry so? You makes me feel very bad."

"Innocent little heart!" cried the mother, pressing the child the closer, "you cannot understand. They intend to keep us here against our will, and will not let us return to papa. Oh! what can it mean, what can it mean!"

In due time a tempting breakfast was brought up, and being by that time very hungry, having eaten nothing, scarcely, for several days, and knowing the folly of refusing to eat, Mrs. Russellford did full justice to it.

"I am glad to see that you have acted so sensibly," remarked the woman when she came in again. "You would gain nothing by starving yourself, and would only make yourself ill by it."

"Yes, I feel a great deal better for it, that is true," the lady acknowledged. "Now if I could only be allowed to return home."

"That is not to be thought of, madam, and I hope you will not mention it again."

"You said you would be my friend if I would only let you."

"And so I will, too, most heartily."

"Do you know what that means?"

"I think I do. I will be kind and attentive to you, and will make your stay here as cheerful and pleasant as I possibly can."

"True friendship would set me free immediately."

"Please do not speak of that any more. I cannot. And, indeed, you are better off where you are, did you but know it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I cannot tell you, but you can believe it. A home without a husband's love cannot long be a happy place for a wife, unless that husband is inclined to overcome the lack of love by duty, honor, integrity and devotion."

Mrs. Russellford was amazed. What meant such words as these? And the woman's language surprised her, too. Its howed that she was not uneducated, and that perhaps she was not a servant as she had first taken her to be.

"What do you mean? what can you mean?" Mrs. Russellford asked.

"There, I see that I have said too much. I

must say no more. Pray forget my words, madam."

"Forget them! You have insinuated that my husband does not love me. You do not know him."

"Well, well, let us say no more about it—"

"But you must say more. You must tell me what your words meant. You must not leave me in this frame of mind, indeed you must not."

"I can say no more now, madam."

"Well, at least tell me where I am," Mrs. Russellford pleaded.

"You are still in New York. I can tell you no more than that. Now I must leave you. See, you have a nice room, everything is pleasant, your child is with you, you can have anything that you ask for, and you ought to be contented."

"Do not go, please do not leave me—"

"There, there, madam, do not try to detain me, and do not excite yourself. I can stay no longer now. If you want anything, ring."

With that she hastened out and closed the door, leaving Mrs. Russellford in a state of the greatest mental disquietude.

The woman's words troubled her. What was their meaning? Could it be that there was anything in them? But, no, no! it was impossible. Still, what— But, she could not think. Wild as her imaginings might be, she could not bring herself to believe that her husband did not love her.

Having now her child with her, she was greatly comforted as compared with the previous day, but she could not be contented.

The front windows of the room she was in looked down upon a rather broad and quiet street, and the buildings on the opposite side were all handsome dwellings. She was not able to tell what street it was, however.

The windows were of thick plate glass, and they were fastened down. She could not raise them, and it would have required a hard blow to break the glass.

There were plenty of books and papers in the room, and she tried to pass the time with them. The windows, too, afforded her some diversion, but her greatest solace was her little daughter.

The house was very quiet, and nothing more was seen of the woman until about half-past twelve, when she came up to inquire what Mrs. Russellford would have for her lunch.

At that time the imprisoned lady tried to gain further information, but the woman would not talk. She tried to bribe her, too, to convey a message to her husband, but the attempt was utterly useless.

Some time along in the afternoon, while little Eulalie was sleeping and she was looking out the window, she saw a person whom she recognized.

This person was a woman of about her own age whose name was Zara Royal. She came up the street and entered a house almost opposite to the one Mrs. Russellford was in.

At sight of her a flood of memories came into her mind. This Zara Royal had been her rival for the love of Henry Russellford. Formerly they had been good friends, but when Mr. Russellford made his choice between them, Zara's friendship turned to almost hatred. She was rich and good-looking, while Mrs. Russellford was only the latter, and had looked upon her victory as certain.

At sight of her, old memories came back, and with them came the woman's words intimating that her husband no longer loved her. Was there anything in those words? Could it be true that some one had stolen his love from her? If true, was that person Zara Royal? But, no, no! she could not—would not believe it!

CHAPTER XII.

DANIELS TAKES A PARTNER.

THREATS were lost upon Duke Daniels. He knew not, from experience, the meaning of the word fear.

Nevertheless, he was concerned about the notes he had received from the mysterious "I. C. Allthings," as the person signed himself.

Those notes proved two things: that he was being watched by some one, and that he was to meet determined opposition in the case.

On receiving the second warning, as set forth at the close of a preceding chapter, he dashed the note down upon his desk as soon as he had read it, impatiently exclaiming:

"This is the second shot of the sort, and I would like to know what it means. It evidently means business, but who is the sender? It is clear that some one is watching my movements, and that I do not like. It is clear, too, that some one is going to make a fight against me. Well, let him come. I am glad he has warned me, anyhow, for now I shall be on guard."

Leaning back in his chair he ran the case over in mind.

"I do not understand it at all," he mused. "I believe it grows worse instead of better. If I could only get hold of some reliable clew, that would be some satisfaction. I am puzzled to imagine how the child and its mother disappeared from that room. The windows afforded no means, the doors are said to have been found fastened in both instances, and I am sure that there is no secret door anywhere."

He was silent and thoughtful for quite a little time, trying to see whether he had left any stone unturned.

He could not find where he had.

"Can it be," he further reflected, "that Mr. Russellford is at the bottom of it, after all? But, no, that is out of the question. I have settled that point before. He is entirely in the dark. That Max Barrows affair cut him up dreadfully."

"And then, again, what of Mrs. Russellford? If I could only understand how she got out of the room! The fact that her own clothing and the child's is gone, is significant. Still, it may amount to nothing when I come to understand the case fully—if I ever do."

"I must go this night and get hold of that Max Barrows again. I must make him tell me the secret he holds, whatever it is. I ought to have got it out of him last night, but I had other plans in view then."

While he was still considering the case, the door of the office opened, and a young man came in.

"Hello! Roger, how are you?" the detective greeted.

"I am well, thanks," was the response; "and I guess I find you the same."

"I guess you do," Daniels agreed. "But what ill wind is it that blows you around this way?"

"Am I to take that as a compliment or not?" the young man asked, smiling. "It is an ill wind that blows no good, you know."

"Oh, take it as a compliment, of course."

"Why," the young man explained, as he seated himself, "I have got to 'do' a column on the Russellford case, and learning that you are working it up, I thought I'd drop in and see you."

"Oh, that is it, eh?"

Roger Kempton was a reporter on one of the daily papers of the city.

He was a young man, not more than twenty-one at most, but he was smart, and was pushing right to the front in his chosen vocation. He was tall, good-looking, and intelligent, and was blessed with a remarkably nimble tongue.

Duke Daniels and he had somehow become acquainted, and they were on good and friendly terms.

"Yes, that is just it," the reporter assured, in response to the detective's last-quoted observation. "Can you give me any tips?"

"I am afraid not, Roger," Daniels answered.

"I am sadly in want of them myself. Who told you that I am on the case?"

"Mr. Russellford."

"Have you just come from him?"

"Yes."

"What did he tell you?"

"Well, about nothing. He referred me to you. Said he did not want to say anything, as what he might say might interfere with plans of yours."

"I am glad to know that he is thoughtful. Of course he told you about the disappearance of his wife."

"I had already heard about that."

"And he told you about its being a mystery how she got out of the room?"

"Yes; and, by the way, can you offer any explanation on that head?"

"Before I talk let us understand each other. Who am I talking to? simply Roger Kempton?"

"Yes, if you want it so."

"Very well, it is so understood. I will talk to you first, and to the reporter afterward. We know each other well enough to make this unnecessary, but it will do no harm. Now, what did you ask me?"

"I won't put in a word more than you give me leave to," the reporter assured. "I asked you if you could offer any explanation to the mystery of how the missing ones got out of that room."

"I cannot. I am at a loss completely."

"What is your opinion in regard to the case?"

"I hardly know. It looks cloudy in Mrs. Russellford's direction. I can't say anything definite yet, however."

"Then you suspect the woman, eh?"

"I cannot help it, for reasons which I am not quite prepared to mention yet, even to you. By the way, how would you like to take a hand in the game?"

"I!"

"Yes, you. There is one part that has got to be worked up, and I think you are just the man to do it. At the same time you will be getting points for your paper, and perhaps ahead of other fellows."

"Well, I am certainly into anything of that sort. What is the scheme?"

"I have got to know all about Mrs. Russellford's past, and all about her family that I can learn. Can't you take hold and hunt it out?"

"Yes, if you will give me the start. We have been trying to get hold of something of that sort, but Russellford won't talk to reporters much."

"I noticed that there was little said in the papers in that line, and this is your chance to get in ahead, for I have got all you will need to start on. The only thing I ask is, that you will

let me know what you learn before you give it to the public."

"I'll do that, of course."

"Very well. Mrs. Russellford's name was Corinne Tetteigh. She and her mother came to this city about seven years ago. They came from—" giving the name of the town and State. "Mrs. Tetteigh was a widow, and Corinne was her only living child. Mrs. Russellford has some relatives out in that section. Her mother is dead. That is about all I know, but it is sufficient to begin on. I was going to send a man right out there, but if you will take hold of it I will trust it to you."

"And I'll do it. Not that I'll go out there, but I have handled just such matters before and know how to get what we want."

"That is settled, then. I leave it all to you."

"And I'll let you know every point I gain."

"All right; and now I'm ready to talk to the reporter."

The reporter smiled.

"Well," he returned, "about all you can tell the reporter, I guess, is the same old story; that is, the detective is on the track, and the mystery will soon be cleared."

"You can't say that much in this case," returned Daniels. "The detective hardly knows what he is doing, yet. But, seriously, I do not want my name mentioned at all, nor any of my opinions. If I have said anything that you can use otherwise, go ahead and use it."

"It is little enough, but I can make much of little, you know."

They talked on, and presently the reporter went away.

In less than an hour he was back again, and he entered the office in something of a manner of excitement.

"What is up now?" the detective asked.

"Read that," the reporter responded, and as he spoke he flung a piece of paper down on the desk.

The detective took it up, and the moment his eyes fell upon the writing he recognized it.

It was the same hand that had written twice to him.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

"Read it, read it," the reporter urged.

"But can't you answer my question?"

"I will tell you all about it as soon as you have read it."

"Well, I will read it," and the detective read as follows:

"YOUNG MAN:—

"You are hereby warned of the danger that is ahead of you, if you have anything to do with the Russellford matter. Let it drop as you would a live coal. It will burn your fingers if you don't. Let this warning be enough. Have nothing to do with the matter whatever, further than as a reporter."

"Truly, I. C. ALLTHINGS."

"There, I have read it," said Daniels, "and now where did you get it?"

"I found it on my desk in the office when I went from here. No one could tell me how it came there—"

"Have you shown it to others?" the detective interrupted.

"No one has read it, but I inquired who had been near my desk. No one had been seen there at all."

The detective opened his desk and took out the notes he had received, and the dagger that had accompanied the first one.

The reporter looked at them in open-mouthed amazement.

"Are you ready to back out?" the detective asked, smiling.

"No, sir, I am not," was the firm answer.

"I am eager now to know more of this."

"I thought I was not mistaken in you," Daniels commented.

"This will be of no use to you, I see," the younger man observed, "seeing that you have some of the same sort. I thought I would bring it right to you, so that you might use it if you could."

"No, it is of no use to me. I would make no mention of it in the paper, if I were you."

"I shall not. Now I am into the case as a detective as well as reporter. I will attend to what we talked over, and move besides if chance offers."

"Good! Go right ahead, and I hope that you will strike the clew that I am trying to get hold of, whatever it may be. Keep your top eye open for Mr. Allthings, though. Don't let him down you."

"I shall try not to give him a chance, you may be sure."

Who could the unknown be?

CHAPTER XIII.

A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES.

"Is Miss Royal at home?"

"What name, sir, please?"

"Mr. Marchmont."

"Yes, sir, she is at home; come in, sir."

Old grammarians used to set forth the proposition that "a thing cannot be and not be at the same time." Here is an instance, however, that goes to prove the contrary. In our cities a person may be at home or not be at home, at one and the same time, as suits that person's convenience.

The caller was shown into the parlor, and the servant went to announce his presence.

The house was a handsome residence on one of the aristocratic up-town streets, and its interior bespoke a person of wealth and good taste as its occupant.

It was in the afternoon of the day of which the previous chapter treats, and the caller inquiring for Miss Royal had come to the house in a carriage.

He was a tall, finely-formed and good-looking man of about thirty-five. He was well dressed, his clothes being both fine and fashionable, and any one would have set him down at a glance as a man of wealth.

Such Anthon Marchmont was. His father's only heir, he had inherited property to the value of about half a million.

He was not kept long waiting. The door soon opened and a beautiful woman of about thirty came into the room.

She was tall and graceful, with dark hair and eyes, and a form that was faultless. Attired in a neatly fitting house-dress of rich material, the folds of which draped harmoniously, suggesting the outlines of the form they veiled, her presence was at once charming and commanding.

Zara Royal was, as said, about thirty years of age. She was an orphan, unmarried, and, like Anthon Marchmont, rich.

She kept house, generally had plenty of company around her, and held a coveted place in society.

"Anthon, I am glad to see you," she greeted as soon as she entered the room, and she advanced and held out her hand.

"Thank you," returned the caller, as he rose and took the proffered hand; "I am none the less glad to see you. How truly beautiful you are, Zara."

With a light laugh she threw his hand from her.

"Sit down," she said, "and do not talk nonsense. It is a wonder that you do not fall in love with me, if I am all that you would have me think."

This was said in the lightest manner imaginable.

"It is a wonder, indeed," returned Marchmont. "I am glad, however, that such is not the case."

"And so am I. But, why do you rejoice over it?"

"Because I should love in vain; and that is, I have found, a rather barren sort of love."

The woman's beautiful face hardened.

"I agree with you," she said. "I agree with you in all you say. Your love would be in vain, and not only that, but utterly hopeless. It is clearly a case of 'ditto' between us."

"Yes, we are on even footing, Zara, and strangest of all, our interests are identical in the game we are playing."

"Well, what progress are you making?"

"Splendid! Have you not read the papers?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, and I am intensely interested. I want to ask you a question, if you have no objection."

"I have no objection to your asking a hundred, if you desire," was the response.

"How did you get the child and her out of that room, leaving the doors still fastened as you did?"

Marchmont laughed.

"Woman's curiosity, I see," he observed.

"Call it that if you want to. I am curious to know how it was done."

"Well, I am sorry that I cannot gratify your curiosity, Zara, but I prefer not to let that secret out."

"There! just as I expected."

"Then you are not disappointed. No, I prefer to keep that to myself. It is a secret that may serve me further good turns, and a secret shared with any one is no secret."

"Well, keep it, then. I thought you would tell me, however, as we are both concerned in it."

"I prefer not to. But, let us go over this whole thing at length, Zara, and have a sound understanding of what we are doing."

"By all means."

"Well, then, here is the case in a nutshell. I loved Corinne Tetteigh and you loved Henry Russellford. We love them yet. Had they never met, it is safe to say that she would now be my wife and he your husband. Is this not so?"

"It is so."

"But, as it turned out, no sooner had they met than they loved, and we were both disappointed."

The woman sat gazing at the floor, her hands clasped in her lap, and a look of intense jealous hatred in her eyes.

"She never loved him as I do," she almost grated.

"I cannot say that much," said Marchmont, "but I know that he could not love her more than I did—and do. Previously, you and I had been something like half-way lovers, and we were drawn apart at about the same time."

"When Corinne and Russellford were married I vowed that I would sooner or later mar their happiness, and that she should be mine at last. I made no threats, for had I done so that would but turn suspicion upon me now. I foresaw

that. I was quiet, but determined, and so they will find me to the end.

"The first step has been taken, the husband and wife are parted, and now it only remains for me—I should say us—to carry out the plans to the end and win the game."

"I am with you, Anthon, heart and soul."

"I know you are. Were you not, we would not be talking as plainly as we are about the matter."

"Where are your prisoners?" the woman asked. "Or," she added, "is that something else you do not want to tell?"

"Step here to the window, and I will show you where they are," was the answer Marchmont gave.

"You will show me? What do you mean? Surely they are not in your carriage, are they?"

"Of course not. Turn your eyes to that window over yonder," pointing, "and you will see where their prison is. Ha! there is Corinne now, looking out."

"So she is! Why, she will see you when you leave here."

"She will not know me if she does, for she never saw me with a full beard."

"That is so."

"Now, can you guess why she is there? That is, why I have placed her opposite your house?"

"I can guess. It is a good plan. If I do not cause her heart to ache with jealousy, then it will be because no opportunity is offered."

They resumed their seats.

"The opportunity must be made," said Marchmont. "You must bring Henry Russellford here, and not only once but many times. You must make the most of every opportunity, too, and make Corinne believe that he is false to her and true to you after all. At the same time the other side of the scheme will be at work for you, as I promised to lead him to think that she has been false to him."

"I see, I see! It will be splendid, and it is bound to work, too. We shall part them yet, Anthon, and have for ourselves the ones we love."

"I shall, at any rate, if I have to spend my fortune to attain that end. I have vowed that Corinne shall be mine, and she shall be mine. I have waited five years, an age, it seems; and I wait no longer. The work has been well begun, the worst of it is over, and it now only remains to play well our cards."

"And I will help you—oh! how willingly I will help you! I have never loved but once, as I have told you, and my heart is still on fire with that passion. Not to any one else would I make such an acknowledgment, but we know each other and our interests are one, as you have said."

"Yes, it is the same motive that actuates us both."

Both deeply in earnest, both faces flushed with the excitement their evil scheme lent, a person seeing them, without hearing their words, might have taken them to be lovers.

They were indeed a handsome couple, but both were evil at heart.

"By the way," Marchmont presently asked, "is that pretty maid with you yet, Zarah?"

"You mean Beatrix Penne?"

"I have forgotten her name; I mean the one who looks something like Corinne."

"That is she. Yes, she is with me yet."

"Good. Can you depend on her to help us a little?"

"I can depend on her for anything. You never saw such a devoted creature. I have only to direct her, and it is done."

"No matter what?"

"Anything short of actual crime, I am sure."

"Well, we must make use of her in this case."

"How?"

"She must play the part of Mrs. Russellford, in order to prove to Henry that his dear Corinne has been faithless to him. He must see her, with his child, in the company of some man, and her actions must be such as will lead him to hate her forever. Then your road will be clear."

"What a plotter you are! It will be easy, for Beatrix has a lover whom she can play upon."

"Good enough. I see my way growing clearer at every step. Now, it only remains for us to talk over the details of our plans, and get ready to act upon them."

"Well, what are the plans?"

"You must bring Henry Russellford here, as I have said. The woman who has Corinne in charge will take care that she see him come here. The rest I leave to you. At the same time it must be arranged so that Henry will see that maid of yours and her lover—Ha! I have it. They will ride by while Henry is here, and he can see them. He will know his child, and will be willing to swear that it is his wife in the carriage."

"But," the woman objected, "will not Corinne see them?"

Marchmont was thoughtful.

"No," he said, "that need not follow. It can be arranged so that she will not see who is in the carriage."

For an hour or longer the evil ones plotted on,

and when they parted at last their plans were all arranged for the carrying out of their nefarious schemes.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNDUTIFUL SON GONE.

WHEN Max Barrows closed the door of his room, after his drunken father and his worthy companion had been put out, he arranged his ruffled clothes and sat down.

His temper was even more ruffled than his clothes had been.

"This settles it forever!" he exclaimed in an undertone. "Even if I had not decided to throw him off, I would do it now. They came here with the intention of robbing me, that is clear."

He felt to make sure that his money was safe.

"Why don't I be a man and be independent, eh?" he mused. "That sticks in my crop. I mean to do it. As soon as I can get a job, I'll trouble her no more."

It seemed as though a new spirit had been born in his breast. The cutting rebuke had roused whatever of manhood there was in him.

"I will go away from here this night, and he will never see me again if I can help it," he further reflected. "If he is determined to wallow in the gutter with Dob Ritters, he shall not keep me there with him."

"Nor shall he ever again be the means of my losing a situation. Should he learn where I am, and attempt to hang around as he has done before, I will have him arrested as sure as I live."

His manner indicated that his reflections were determined.

While he sat thinking, he presently caught sight of something on the floor.

It was a little package, carefully wrapped and tied. He recognized it instantly.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "dad lost his photograph in the tussle. He will be lost without that. I should think it would bring him to realize to what a degraded state he has sunk. Nothing can do that, though, I guess—Hello! what is this?"

The second exclamation was brought out by the finding of another small package.

Laying aside the photograph, he turned the second package over and over in hand, examining it on all sides.

It was about five inches in length by three in width, and about an inch in thickness. It was carefully wrapped in strong paper that was dirty and worn, and was securely tied with strong string.

"This is something that I have never seen before," the youth commented. "It is something that dad has kept well out of sight. What can it be? I believe I will take it upon myself to investigate."

Getting up he went to the door and locked it, and then drawing the one chair of the room up to a little stand that was near the light, sat down again.

Still he hesitated about opening the packet. He turned it over and over in his hands several times more before he fully decided. There was no mark of any sort on the outside, except the one general mark of dirt, and that told him nothing.

"Yes, I'll have to open it if I want to know what is in it," he finally made up his mind, "and here goes."

With his knife he cut the string, and when he had unwound several yards of that he came down to the paper. That was wrapped several thicknesses, but it was soon unfolded, and then a bunch of several letters, tied with a string, was revealed to sight.

The youth took them up one by one, when he had removed the string, and saw that they were all in the same handwriting and all from the same place.

Between the last two of the lot was a little paper that had the appearance of being a legal document of some sort, and the youth read that first, it being brief and having no envelope.

As he read it his eyes opened to their widest, and he could not have concealed the excitement it caused him.

"Well, I'll be dashed!" he exclaimed, and throwing the paper down upon the stand he got up and paced the floor.

"Who would have thought it?" he muttered. "Dad has been playing a bold game, and he has used me for a tool. But how can it be? There is a mystery back of it all that even this don't explain. I can't see through it."

"How is it that Mrs. Russellford don't know the truth? There is something crooked about it yet. Well, anyhow, this proves that I am not in the boat dad has always told me I was in, and there is some satisfaction in that."

"Now, what steps am I to take? Shall I go right to Mrs. Russellford and tell her the whole story, and—No, that won't do, for it might not prove anything to my good, and I can't afford to let go my hold upon her till I have made myself secure in some way."

"No, I'll never go to her until I have followed her advice and made a man of myself. But am I in a fair way to do that, if I still hold back in this matter? Well, it is a question of bread and butter with me now. When it gets past that stage it will be different."

"No, I'll wait till I see my way clear. In the

mean time I'll cut loose from dad right here and now, and he will never see these papers again. This will cut his hold loose, and it is not likely that he will ever dare to declare who he is. But, I must see what the letters say."

Resuming his seat he began to read the letters. It took him some time to read them all, and when he had finally done his face was a study.

Replacing them one by one, and the other document with them, he folded them up again as carefully as they had been, tied them as before, and put the packet carefully away into the inside pocket of his vest.

He put the photograph into the same pocket.

"There is more to this than I can understand," he muttered again, "but I can understand that dad has been playing a tricky game. He has no hold at all upon Mrs. Russellford, if she only knew it, and it puzzles me how it is that she don't know it. I shall find out all about that in good time, perhaps. The thing for me to do now is to brace up and find a job, and make something of myself. When I have done that I will go and see her."

He was pacing the floor, but suddenly he stopped short.

"Won't I be a fool to give up such a snap, though?" he questioned. "Here is a woman who is in mortal fear of her husband's finding out a certain secret, and it will be money into my pocket all the year round if I keep my hold upon her. If I give the thing away to her it will cut me adrift, and some day I might be sorry for it, to say nothing of the chances that she might have me arrested."

"I am in a ticklish place. I don't know what to do. On one hand she has made me ashamed of myself, and I want to do what's right; but on the other hand, it don't seem like boss-sense to throw away a thing that is as good as a Government bond. Well, I'll have to think it over before I decide. As for that Mr. John Daws, the lawyer—as I take him to be—I don't want to have too much to do with him. I don't like his eyes. He might get me into trouble before I would know it. No; I'll go it alone for the present, and not trouble him any."

He spent an hour or more in talking thus to himself, but finally came to an abrupt stop, jerked an old valise out from under the bed, dusted it, and proceeded to pack his clothes and other effects into it.

This did not take him long, as his possessions were limited, and as soon as it was done he opened the door, turned out the light, took up his valise and went down-stairs.

There he settled his score with his landlady, since she happened to see him come down, and that done he passed out into the night.

He had been gone but a little while when Job Barrows and Dob Ritters presented themselves at the door.

"I want ter see that 'ere dootiful son o' mine," Job demanded.

"You can't come in," said the landlady, decisively; and she was large and muscular enough to stand by her decision.

"Oh, but I must come in," Job protested. "I have got to see him quick on 'portant business."

"You can't come in nohow, sir. Besides, your son is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, gone."

"Where's he gone ter?"

"How should I know? I am not his keeper. He paid me up and went off, taking his things with him."

"D'y'e hear that, Dob?" Job demanded, turning to his crony.

"I hear it Job," that worthy answered.

The landlady was about to shut the door upon them.

"Hold on, hold on, hold on!" cried Job wildly. "I ain't done yet. I'll tell ye what I wanted, ma'am. Ye see I lost somethin' when I had th' little scrap with my dootiful son up there in his room, an' I want ter git it. Will ye let me go up an' look fer it?"

"Not by any means, I won't," was the snapped retort. "I won't disgrace my house any more by havin' you in it. If you'll tell me what it was you lost, though, I'll see if I can find it for ye."

"Well, ma'am, it was two little packages, about so big, wrapped in paper and tied with strings. They must 'a' dropped out o' me pocket."

"Very well, I'll see if they can be found anywhere."

With that the landlady turned away and closed and locked the door.

"Bob, I am all broke up," Job complained.

"I don't wonder at it, Job," Dob sympathized.

"She won't disgrace her house by havin' us in it."

"Them's her words, Job."

"If she finds that photo, Dob, I'll show it to her and let her see th' sort o' gentleman she was talkin' to."

"I would, Job; it would serve her right."

"And ter think that that boy has given us th' shake."

"After th' times and times again that I've heard you tell him—'Honor thy father and mother.'"

"That is th' sort o' dootiful son he is. It has been writ, Dob, that—'More bitterer far than a two-edged sword is a onthankfulness child.'"

"I feel for ye, Job, with all me heart."

The landlady here returned to the door.

"There ain't nothin' o' that sort in that room, nor anywhere else," she reported.

"Goodness! didn't ye find it?" Job exclaimed.

"Nary a find, and I looked good. It ain't in th' house. Now be off with ye, and don't never show yer heads here again."

With that she slammed the door shut, and they were left outside.

The two bummers looked at each other woefully.

"Bob," said Job, "we're insulted."

"Job, we be," Bob agreed.

"Let's go and take a drink."

They linked arms and started off to find the nearest saloon.

CHAPTER XV.

DUKE DANIELS IN THE TOILS.

ON the afternoon of the day of Mrs. Russellford's disappearance, Mr. Russellford called again at the office of the detective.

He was almost distracted. He had almost lost the power of thought, he declared.

"Have you learned anything yet?" was his anxious question, as he threw himself down upon a chair.

The detective puled him, and gladly would he have given him some cheering news, could he have done so.

"Nothing," he owned.

"Then you are behind the police," observed Mr. Russellford.

"How is that?" the detective asked.

"I have learned that they have suspicion against a certain person."

"And who is that person?"

"Myself."

"Oh, I was aware of that," said the detective.

"You were?"

"Yes; they have been inclined to suspect you from the very first."

"And why should they suspect me?"

"Owing to the fact that they cannot account for the manner in which your wife and child disappeared from that closed and locked room."

"And they think that I am at the bottom of it, that I have put them away."

"They are inclined to think there is something in that theory."

"But you do not?"

"I do not."

"Why?"

"I know better, sir. I have looked at it from every point, and I have settled that question in my mind."

"I am glad to know that. Would to Heaven that the truth of the matter could be learned. You do not know—you cannot imagine—the torture I am in. And it has been worse since you told me about that Max Barrows affair. What possible claim can he have had upon my wife? She was as pure and innocent as the angels are, almost, sir, and I will not think ill of her."

"I admire you for that."

"But still that awful mystery is there. What can it mean? Oh, can you not offer some explanation?"

"Nothing, yet, further than you have already heard. It looks suspicious against your wife, sir, but I hope for your sake that she will come out of it spotless. The only other view that I can advance is that you must have an enemy."

"And I have told you that I am sure that I have none."

"Have you gone over your whole past life, in thought, trying to see whether you have ever wronged any one, intentionally or otherwise?"

"I have put my whole life before me in review, sir, and I can find nothing that should win the enmity of any one."

"Well, it is more than strange, that is all; and since you are so positive about that, the suspicion is only the stronger against your wife. Pardon me, sir, but I must speak plainly. You must look this matter right in the face. I hope we shall be able to prove her innocent of everything, however, as I said."

Mr. Russellford groaned.

"But, what are you doing?" he asked. "Here I find you sitting in your office, as unconcerned as though you had nothing to do. Pardon my bluntness, but you do not know what my feelings are."

"I could not gain anything by going out into the street and running up and down, could I, sir?" the detective counter-questioned. "I am taking steps to inquire into your wife's family history, and into her own history before you knew her. This evening I shall go and see Max Barrows, as I have already told you."

"And all this must consume time."

"Yes, necessarily. It cannot be otherwise."

"And in the mean time I must bear up under this terrible torture of mind, not knowing whether my loved ones are living or dead."

"You forget that I have pointed out proof that they are living. All their clothes being missing with them proves that."

"Yes, yes, I had forgotten."

Their talk ran on, the detective tried all he

knew to cheer the stricken man up, and at last when Mr. Russellford went away he seemed a little brighter in spirits than when he had come.

That evening Duke Daniels set out to find Max Barrows.

Arriving at the boarding-house he rung the bell, and the landlady came to the door.

"Is Max Barrows in his room?" he inquired.

"Max Barrows has gone," was the information he got.

"Gone! Gone where, madam?"

"Yes, sir, gone; I don't know where. What is more, I don't care, so long as he don't owe me anything. Perhaps I would be more concerned about him, sir, but I happened to see him come down stairs with his valise in his hand, and I collared him and made him pony up."

"That was quite right, madam; and, since you were so fortunate yourself, you may be able to help me out, if you can only put me on his track. Have you any idea to what part of the city he was going?"

"Ha, he owes you, then, eh? That is th' worst of them young men, sir, there is no 'pendence to be put on 'em. No, I haven't th' slightest idea where he was goin' to, sir. He didn't let a word out about it."

"Well, that is bad. I had no idea that he would pick up and get out so soon. Perhaps you can tell me the name and address of some friend or companion of his who would be likely to know something about him."

"No, I don't think I can, sir. He had few callers, and I never knowed anything about any of 'em."

"That is bad indeed. Do you know any particular place that he frequented, and to which he would be likely to go again?"

"Not a place, sir. I'm sorry, and I'd help you if I could, for I know what it is to lose money in this way, but I can't tell you a thing more than I have."

"He left nothing in his room that might tell us something, eh?"

"Not a thing, sir. His father was here—"

"His father?"

"Yes; and—there! why didn't I think of him? He may be able to tell you something about him, sir."

"Well, who is he? and where will I be likely to find him?"

"Oh, he is only a drunken wretch that hangs out in th' saloons in this part of th' city. His name is Job Barrows. He is known in every saloon, so you can't miss him. I don't see why I didn't think of him, for he was here last night, and th' boy and him had a reg'lar fight."

"Had a fight, eh?" the detective encouraged, leading her to talk more.

"Oh, yes, a reg'lar scrap, sir. It seems th' old man and his partner came to rob th' boy, but the lad got away with them, or at any rate he called for help and some of th' other boarders went to his assistance; and they chucked 'em out neck and heels."

"Good for them. But, who is this partner you speak of?"

"Oh, he is Job's crony. His name is Dob Ritters, and where you find one you will most allus find t'other. Jest inquire at any of th' saloons around here."

"Thank you, madam," the detective repaid, as he turned away. "I'll see if I can find these twins you speak of."

"Oh, you'll find 'em sure enough," was the laughing rejoinder; "jest inquire in th' saloons, sir, an' you can't miss 'em."

The detective turned away finally, then, and the woman closed the door.

Just as Daniels was starting off, however, a detaining hand was laid upon his arm.

In some surprise he wheeled around to see who it was.

"Scuse me, sir," the person spoke, "but be you lookin' fer Max Barrows?"

He was a young man, at any rate a man not over thirty, and while not exactly a rough-looking character he was neither well dressed nor inviting in appearance.

"Yes, I am looking for him," the detective owned; "why, what do you know about him?"

"I happen ter know where he is."

"Who are you?"

"My name's Riggles, sir."

"And are you a friend of his?"

"Yes; me an' him chums together some."

"How did you know I was looking for him?"

"Why, I heard ye askin' th' landlady. I stood there in the shadder of th' stoop while ye was talkin'."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes, straight."

"How is it, then, that you are willing to show me where your friend is, when you must know from what you heard that I am after him for a debt?"

"I know better'n that, though."

"Oh, do you? Well, now, what do you know? Come, show your hand."

"I have seen you afore, sir. In fact, Max put me onto your haze. You are th' Mr. John Daws that was here last night, and I reckon you want ter see Max on biz. Ain't that straight?"

"That is straight enough, but you were not looking for me, were you?"

"Well, no, not jest that, but Max told me to tell you where ter find him in case you should come 'round."

"All right; Well, where will I find him?"

"He is stoppin' at —" giving street and number. "I was goin' around there myself, and I'll go with you if you don't 'bject."

"Come right along, then. I want to see the young man in private, but of course that can be easily arranged."

"Oh, yes, I kin hold off till you go. I'll just show ye to his room."

They set out, the stranger leading the way, though Duke Daniels required no leader in New York.

But this was a case of the trapper trapped—or it was destined to be.

They talked as they walked along, the detective trying to learn all he could about Max Barrows and his father, but he got nothing further than such general information as any one might get hold of concerning them.

When their destination was reached it proved to be a rather low saloon, with rooms to let on the floors above. The guide seemed well acquainted with the place, for entering the hall he led the way right up stairs, and arriving at a room on the second floor he opened the door and stepped in. The detective followed, but barely had he crossed the sill when a heavy blow fell upon his head and he sunk senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CLEW BY CHANCE.

WHEN Roger Kempton left the office of the detective, after his second interview with him, he was not in an altogether easy frame of mind.

He could not take the threat of the mysterious Unknown as coolly as Duke Daniels did.

Had he better heed the warning? he asked himself. Had he better drop out of the case and have nothing to do with it?

These questions came to his mind, but he soon disposed of them.

No, he would push on and see what would come of it. He had given the detective his word and he could not go back on that, be the cost what it might. But, he was not inclined to draw out of it anyhow. He was not that sort of man.

Nevertheless, he was not easy in mind, as stated. The note he had received was only one, but now that he had seen those that had been sent to the detective, too, he knew there must be something in it.

The strongest feature in it was the knowledge that he was evidently being watched by some one. That was highly objectionable, and had more weight than any other consideration.

"No," he decided flatly, "I will not allow myself to be frightened off. In fact, the threat only makes me the more determined. I am going to put my shoulder to the wheel, both as reporter and amateur detective."

Young Kempton was full of nerve, possessing more than he was aware of, perhaps, and in anything where his reputation as a reporter was at stake he had never yet been found wanting.

He returned to his office, flung aside his hat, and for some time was busy at his desk.

After awhile he glanced up at the clock, and putting his manuscript away in the desk, put on his hat and went out.

The hour was half-past twelve, and his inner man had suggested that it was high time for dinner.

When he went out, though, instead of going to a restaurant, as might have been expected under the circumstances, he walked several blocks to one of the central telephone offices.

He went in as though he had been there before, and with the air of one who knew where he was going and what he was going for.

In the rear part of a large room several young ladies were busily engaged at crossing and re-crossing the wires, as different connections were called for every moment from every quarter of the city.

This part of the room was inclosed by a heavy railing, which separated it from the offices that occupied the other portions of the same floor.

The young man advanced to that railing and waited, and presently one of the young ladies, turning around, saw him.

She immediately greeted him with a smile, and exclaimed:

"Hello! is that you?"

Kempton laughed.

"Yes, it is I," he responded; "and how pat you have got that exclamation and inquiry, Haidee."

"Have I? Well, it is not to be wondered at, for it is about all I have to say from morning till night."

The young lady came forward to the railing while speaking, and extended her hand to Kempton, who took it with tender pressure.

Haidee Powers was a young lady of nineteen, and pretty. She was small and lithe of form, with brown hair and a fair complexion and a pair of dancing eyes.

She was a girl who, left an orphan at the age of twelve, had been obliged to make her own way. She had been fortunate in finding employment, and more fortunate in finding a home

with a good woman who took a motherly interest in her welfare.

She and Roger Kempton had met and become acquainted in the time-honored way and they were now lovers.

It was whispered that they were engaged, too, but they had not yet arrived at that happy stage of proceedings.

"It must be tiresome and monotonous," the young man commented, in response to her remark. And he added:

"But, have you had your dinner? I have just set out to get mine, and have called to ask the pleasure of your company. Will you join me?"

"Oh! I could not think of it, Roger," was the answer. "I have my lunch with me, and as soon as Miss Joyce comes in I shall be at liberty for a little while to enjoy that."

"See here," Kempton said playfully, "I won't be put off that way. I have come all the way up from the office on purpose to have you take dinner with me, and I hope you will not refuse. We can go to some nice little restaurant and have a really enjoyable half hour, if you will."

"But, would it be proper?"

"Grandmother! Are you not an American girl? But, if that holds you back, little one, just ask one of your companions to join you."

"None of them will be at liberty at the same time."

"Well, then, come alone. Did you not go to the play with me the other night? And did we not take supper together afterward?"

"Well, if you really insist upon it, I will go."

"And I certainly do. I will wait until you are at liberty."

In a few minutes the young lady Haidee had mentioned came in, and soon after that Haidee was ready for the street.

She had briefly explained the situation to the forewoman.

"I know I shall enjoy my dinner a great deal better for having you with me," Kempton observed as they walked along.

"Then your motive was purely a selfish one, was it?" Haidee roguishly asked, playfully pouting.

"Entirely so," Roger confessed. "Still," he added, "I hope the enjoyment will be mutual."

"Thank you for that much, anyhow," said Haidee; "I hope it will, since you seem to be so sure of yours."

Kempton conducted his fair companion to a restaurant of the better sort, and found a table in a quiet corner where they would be secure from interruption, and where they might talk as freely as they might desire.

When their orders were filled and the waiter had gone, they settled down to the enjoyment of the quiet repast.

"Oh! what is new about the great Russelford case?" the young lady suddenly inquired, as there was a momentary pause in their talk.

"Have you not heard the latest?" Kempton asked.

"How can I tell, unless you tell me what the latest is? I know no more than what was in the papers this morning."

"They did not have it. Why, the latest is that Mrs. Russelford has now disappeared as mysteriously as her child."

"Isn't that wonderful?" Haidee exclaimed.

"How do you account for it?"

"I am not accounting for it at all," was the answer. "It is a great puzzle. In my article to-morrow I am going to head it—Mighty Gotham's Greatest Mystery. I am of the opinion that that is about as good a one as I can find for it."

"I believe it is."

"Can't you offer some suggestion, little one? You are a woman, and may be able to give me an idea or two."

"There!" Haidee exclaimed, "now I understand your motive, Sir Rascal. You have brought me here to interview me."

Kempton laughed.

"Not so bad as that," he responded. "I am merely asking your opinion, my little wild rose."

"Well, I haven't any opinion about it," the young lady declared. "We have been talking about it among ourselves at the office, but none of us can understand it. It is truly a mystery."

"Everybody admits that, but what I am after is the explanation of the enigma. I would give almost anything to be the one to solve the riddle."

"I have no doubt about that, and I wish I were able to help you. I guess my head is too giddy for anything of that sort, though."

"I am not willing to believe that," said Kempton, "this is a matter that is puzzling the ablest detectives in the city."

"How do you know that?" the girl shrewdly asked. "They may be getting ahead faster than you are aware of."

"I have just had an interview with one of the best of them," returned the young reporter, not boastfully but in a matter-of-fact way, "and he admitted as much. He was telling me a straight story, too."

"Who was he?"

"Duke Daniels."

"Indeed! I have heard of him. Well, if it puzzles him as you say, it is no use for me to think about it at all."

"I am not so sure of that. Some little thought of yours might lead to the very clew they are all in search of."

"I'll tell you what, Roger."

"Well, what, Haidee?"

"Why don't you turn detective and solve the mystery for them? That would be just splendid, and I would call you my hero."

"That is inducement enough, certainly, Haidee; but I am afraid it is not in me. My limited talent does not turn in that direction. Still, in my field of reporter I have to do a little in that line. At present I am about to begin to inquire into Mrs. Russelford's past life."

"How will you begin to do that? Do you know where she came from?"

"Yes; the detective told me. She is from—"

"From where?" Haidee immediately asked, interestedly.

Kempton repeated.

"Why, that is the place where Mrs. Bellows is from," the girl excitedly informed. "She may know something about it."

Kempton was interested.

The Mrs. Bellows mentioned was the good woman with whom Haidee boarded, or rather made her home.

"I knew you would do something to help me," Kempton exclaimed. "Here you have put a clew right into my hands, little elf. I shall do myself the honor to call upon Mrs. Bellows immediately."

Their talk ran on until they had finished their dinner, when the young reporter conducted his pretty companion back to the telephone office, and there left her.

"Sweet little Haidee!" he exclaimed, as he walked away; "how much I love her, and how gladly would I ask her to marry me had I a name to give her!"

His head dropped, and he was sad and thoughtful.

CHAPTER XVII.

KEMPTON WARNED AGAIN.

As he had declared his intention of doing, Roger Kempton went at once to see Mrs. Bellows.

She was a widow, and resided with her two sons and a daughter on a humble but respectable East-side street.

The reporter was acquainted with her, having visited Haidee Powers there a number of times.

When he rung the bell Mrs. Bellows came to the door, and her rolled-up sleeves showed that she had been at work.

She was a woman of about fifty years, rather large, and with a kindly, motherly face. Her hair was turning gray, but her face retained much of its earlier freshness.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed heartily, seeing who it was; "come right in, Mr. Kempton, and pray excuse my appearance. I'm hard at work, as usual."

She was a hard-working woman, and was seldom to be found in any other way.

"Don't offer any excuses whatever," responded the reporter, as he shook hands with her, "for your appearance is all right. If you are very hard at work, however," he added, "perhaps I had better call again at some other time, for I have come to see you, Mrs. Bellows, and would like to have a little talk with you."

"Well, I was never so hard at work that I couldn't find time to talk, Mr. Kempton; so come right in, anyhow, and if you can beat me at talking you will do well."

She ended with a laugh, and Kempton followed her into her neat little sitting-room.

"There," she declared, when they had taken seats, "now I am ready for you."

"And I will come right to the point," said the young reporter. "I understand that you used to live in the town of Dumont, Mrs. Bellows."

"La, sakes, yes!" Mrs. Bellows exclaimed; "that is where I was born, brought up, married, had my children and lived till some years after my husband died. But, how did you know it?"

"Haidee—I mean Miss Powers—told me."

"Oh, yes, I see. Well?"

"Have you taken any interest in the Russelford mystery, Mrs. Bellows?"

"La, yes? And I want to ask you what you think of that case, Mr. Kempton."

Its merits were discussed for some moments, and then the reporter came back to the point in hand.

"Have you any idea who this Mrs. Russelford was, Mrs. Bellows?" he asked.

"Not th' least," was the answer. "I see there's nothin' said about that in th' papers."

"Not a thing. Well, I will tell you who she was, and then I want you to tell me all you can about her and her family connections."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. This Mrs. Russelford came from that same town of Dumont."

"You don't tell! What was her name?"

"Her maiden name was Corinne Tetteigh."

"Well, of all things! Why, I knowed her

mother and father well, Mr. Kempton, and I knowed her too, and her sister."

"I am wonder. I'm glad to hear that. Now, what can you tell me about them?"

The woman was silent for a moment.

"That depends on what you want to know," she answered. "There's no use in my goin' ahead with a great rignmarole and mebbe not touch what you want to know at all. If you'll just start me straight I'll tell you all that I can."

Kempton saw the sense of this, and considered a moment how to best start her aright.

"I will lay the matter before you as clearly as I can," he said, "and then you will be able to see what is wanted. The manner of Mrs. Russelford's going off has aroused the suspicion that perhaps she has deserted her husband, taking her child with her. There is no proof for this, and no motive to show why she should do it. What we are after is, to see if there is anything in her past life that might lead to such action on her part now."

"I see, I see," said the woman. "You want to know all about her and her family, to see if there is any flaw anywhere."

"Well, yes, that is about it."

"Yes, I know just about what you want, and I guess I can tell you as much about them as any one you could find. I hope you won't put me in the papers, though, Mr. Kempton."

"I promise you that your name shall not be mentioned."

"Very well. Now, while I know about as much as any one about them, I don't know much about them after all. There isn't much to know. What little there is, however, you're welcome to."

"Hiram Tetteigh married Pauline Washburn. I knowed them both, and went to the same school with them. They was both of good family, poor but honest, and both was decent and respectable folks. They had only two children, two daughters. I am not quite sure what the oldest one's name was, but the youngest one was Corinne."

"Corinne was about seven years younger than the other one, as I remember well enough, and she was a beauty, as a child, too. The other one was handsome, too, but I don't seem to remember her so well, though I don't know why I shouldn't. But, poor child, she died young."

"She was away at a pay school at the time of her death, for Hiram Tetteigh was comfortably off and could afford it. Corinne was about nine years old at that time, I should say, and that would make Sybil— There! that's her name. That would make her about sixteen at th' time."

"I remember word came that she was very sick, and Hiram and his wife picked right up and started off. I believe they got there just in time to see her die, or was it just after she had died? Well, don't p'tic'lar matter. Anyhow, she died of somethin' that was ketchin', and they had to bury her right there, and they came home 'most heartbroke."

Kempton was taking notes as she was talking on, and as she made a pause he looked up.

"Do you know the name of the place where she was at school?" he asked.

"No, I do not," she answered.

"Well, please go on."

"I guess I have got about to the end of my story. Hiram Tetteigh wasn't never himself again after th' death of his favorite child, as Sybil was, and he grewed old from th' day of her death. It broke Mrs. Tetteigh down, too, but she stood it th' best of th' two. A few years later Hiram died, and about that time I moved away, and that was the last that I ever heard about 'em."

"Well, this is something, at any rate," the reporter commented.

"I don't believe it is much, though," declared the woman. "They was a good, straight and honorable family, for all I ever knowed. If there was anything otherwise, it must 'a' been after Hiram's death."

"We do not know that there was anything wrong," Kempton reminded. "We only want to get at the truth, to see if we can find some way of explaining the present mystery."

"Yes, I see. Well, I don't know any more than what I have told you, in the way of direct family history. Whatever else I might tell wouldn't be of any interest, I am sure."

"I do not know about that, Mrs. Bellows; it might be."

"But, then, there ain't anything more to tell. You wouldn't care a snap to know the kind of house they lived in, who their neighbors was, what church they went to, nor anything in that line."

"Well, perhaps not. Are there any of the family living out there now?"

"That's more'n I can tell. It is very likely that there is. Hiram had two brothers, John and Silas; and Pauline had a brother named Sidney Washburn. They all was married and settled in that part of th' country, and it is likely that some of 'em is there yet."

Kempton noted the names.

"That is all you can tell me, then, is it?" he asked.

"Yes, I guess that is all that would be of interest to you."

"Then I will not trouble you further. I have been keeping you from your work too long as it is."

"Never mind my work, Mr. Kempton. When I get a-talkin' I don't let work bother me any. I work all th' harder afterwards to ketch up."

"Yes, you undoubtedly have to. Well, I will go. I am greatly obliged to you for what you have told me."

"Not at all, not at all. I am only—" But, her tongue rattled right on, and it is not necessary to record her words.

Some further remarks were exchanged, as they proceeded gradually to the front door, and then with a final word Mrs. Bellows opened the front door for her caller to go.

As he did so something fell to the floor of the hall with a sharp ring.

Looking quickly down, what was the reporter's surprise to see at his feet a dagger very like the one Duke Daniels had so mysteriously received. On its blade was a little square of white card-board on which was some writing.

"Land of goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Bellows, "what is that, and where did it come from?"

The reporter examined the front of the door, having already looked out to see if any one was near who might be suspected, and he found a little cut in the wood where the dagger had been lightly stuck.

"It has been stuck here in the door by some one since I came in," he said.

"What in all th' world was it done for?"

"That is hard to tell," was the answer. "I'll put it in my pocket if you don't care, Mrs. Bellows."

He had picked it up so quickly that she had not observed the writing on the card.

"La, sakes, I don't care," she declared; "I don't want the ugly thing around here. It is some of them boys up to their tricks, I reckon."

"It is very likely."

In a few minutes more Kempton started away, and Mrs. Bellows closed the door and returned to her work.

The young reporter's mind was in a whirl. He knew not what to think. Who could the person be who had thrust the dagger in the face of the door in broad daylight, with every chance of being detected in the act?

It was a question he could not answer.

He longed to read what was on the card, but made up his mind that he would not do so until he reached the office. If being watched, he would not give the spy the satisfaction of seeing him read it on the street.

When he entered the office and had flung aside his hat and seated himself at his desk, then he took the card from his pocket and read:

"YOUNG MAN:—

"You will not be warned again. You had better heed the first warning and stop where you are. This matter will get you into trouble if you don't drop it right where it is. Be wise and draw out of the game.

"Yours finally,

"I. C. ALLTHINGS."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DUKE DANIELS RETIRED.

No sooner had Duke Daniels been knocked to the floor, than the young man who had led him into the trap sprung into the room.

The door was closed instantly and locked.

There was another man in the room, the one who had made the attack, and the two proceeded immediately to bind the detective's hands and feet, and to blindfold him and put a gag into his mouth.

The weapon used was a piece of lead pipe, and no noise had been made except that caused by the detective's falling.

Daniels had walked into the trap entirely unsuspecting. The story told had been so natural that it had not aroused even a shadow of suspicion.

What more likely than, Max Barrows going away, he should tell a chum where he was going, and ask him to give his address to the Mr. Daws, in case he should come to see him?

It was entirely plain and plausible, and it was nothing to the detective's discredit that he had been overreached by it.

"That was done fine, Clinkerly," remarked the younger of the two men, as soon as they had secured their victim to their satisfaction.

"It was a daisy job, Pilate, and no mistake about that," Clinkerly agreed. "You don't do no slouch work when you buckle your mind down to it. How did you get him here so nice?"

"You didn't think that I could do it, did you?"

"I confess that I had my doubts about it."

"Well, it was by a little good management and a good deal of dumb luck combined," Pilate explained; and he went ahead and told his companion all about it.

"That was mighty well done," Clinkerly complimented. "That will score you one when I tell th' boss about it."

Rabab Clinkerly was a large man, with a dark and scowling face. He had a big, bristling, black mustache, and his eyes were deep

and snake-like. On this occasion he was rather roughly dressed.

His companion, who has been described, was clearly a hireling of his. His name in full was Pilate Dunkers.

When they had talked for a few moments over the merits of their dastardly act, Clinkerly changed the subject.

"But, come," he reminded, "we are not done yet, Pilate. You go down to the stable and have the team got ready, and then come up here again and we will carry our gentleman down the back way."

"All right. I'll attend to that in about no time, Clinkerly," Pilate promised, and he unlocked the door and went out.

As soon as he was gone, Clinkerly relocked the door, and kneeling by the detective, proceeded to explore his pockets.

His first discovery was a handsome revolver, which he transferred to his own hip-pocket with a smile of the greatest satisfaction.

"Silver-mounted, as I'm a sinner!" he exclaimed; "and it is a beauty, too. It will just fit my pocket."

Next he found a pair of light but strong handcuffs. Going deeper, he drew forth a pocket-book, some loose change, some letters, keys, etc.

All these went into his own pockets.

Before Dunkers returned the detective came to.

This the rascal Clinkerly knew by the movements he made.

It was some moments before the detective could collect his thoughts. He was unable at first to imagine where he was or what had happened.

Finding that he was bound, gagged and blindfolded, still his active mind soon regained its vigor, and he used his reasoning powers.

Soon, then, he remembered all that had taken place. He was in a trap, and perhaps a bad one, too.

Listening, he made out that he was in the saloon, or in the same building at any rate, and had no doubt but he was in the room to which he had been conducted in quest of Max Barrows.

Was it that young man's room? and had he been at the bottom of this? He was unable to decide.

He had keen ears, and soon found that he was not alone in the room. Some other person was there, whoever it might be.

When he had fully come to, and felt his strength returned, he rolled over on his side, and from that position sat up. To get upon his feet, though, was not easy.

He was in a decidedly unpleasant dilemma, to say the least about it.

While he sat thus he heard a step outside, and some one tried the door. Finding it fastened the person knocked.

The person within the room crossed the floor, turned the key and allowed the applicant to enter, and the detective heard him utter a "Sh!" of caution as he did so.

This given, neither of the persons spoke.

It was Dunkers returning, and as soon as Clinkerly had cautioned him not to speak, motioning at the same time that their prisoner had come to, he motioned in turn that the carriage was ready.

There was a bed in the room, and taking a spread from it Clinkerly laid it out on the floor, and he and his companion took their prisoner and rolled him up in it, head and heels.

That done, Clinkerly turned down the light, and the two rascals taking their victim up in their arms carried him from the room.

They went along the hall in the opposite direction to that in which the detective had come, and finally entered another room at the end of the passage. Through that room they went, down two or three steps, along another passage, and finally came to a door that opened upon a flight of stairs.

Duke Daniels was taking mental note of all this, as well as he could under the circumstances.

He was carried down that flight of stairs, and when the bottom was reached the smell and sounds told him that he was in a stable.

A little distance further he was carried, then, and finally was placed in a carriage, the two men getting in with him.

He had asked himself, naturally enough, what it all meant, and in answer he thought of the warnings he had received. It must be that he had fallen into the hands of his mysterious enemy.

Thinking the matter over, he tried to find something to blame himself for in regard to his misfortune, but failed to do so. He had been cleverly overreached, and that was all there was about it.

Still, he was sorry now that he had not settled with Max Barrows finally at their first meeting, and forced his secret out of him then. That would have done away with the necessity of another interview, and he would not be in his present dilemma.

That was all very well; but with that regret next came the reflection that he had thought of that before but had arranged other plans, which had failed him.

Soon after they were in the carriage, the doors of the stable rolled open and the carriage started out.

At first the detective tried to keep in mind the direction taken, but several turns were made and he found it impossible to do so.

He was taken a considerable distance, and knew that he was going up-town instead of down. Further than that he knew nothing of his whereabouts.

Finally the carriage came to a stop, and one of the men got out. In a few minutes the other followed, and between them they lifted the detective out and carried him into a house.

As soon as they were within, the door was closed after them.

There was now a third party present, and the detective heard a whispered conversation between him and one of the others, but could not catch any words.

While they talked he was left lying on the floor of the hall, where they had deposited him.

In a short time they took him up again, carried him along the hall to the rear, and down a flight of stairs to the basement.

Nor did they stop there. They turned, followed another hall for a distance, and descended another flight of stairs to a cellar.

Arriving there, they went forward, and when they stopped finally, the detective heard a heavy key turn in a door that gave out a sound as though it was of iron.

The next moment he was borne forward a little further, and deposited on a hard and cold floor.

He had by this time guessed his fate. He was to be held a prisoner for a while. How long the time would be he dared not think. Not for a moment did he think that his life was in danger.

When he had been laid on the floor he felt one of his captors cut the cords that bound his feet, but the next moment he felt an iron ring encircle one of his ankles, and heard its sharp snap as it was locked. Then followed the rattle of a chain, as the man shook it to make sure that it was secure.

When that was done a pair of handcuffs were snapped on his wrists, after which the cords removed as they had been from his feet.

He was still held to the floor.

When this had been done, he was drawn toward the door until the chain that held his leg was pulled out straight, and then he heard the whispered order given for the lights to be put out.

This was done, as he could see, blindfolded though he was, and two of the men immediately went out.

As soon as they were gone the third removed the gag and the blindfold, and the detective was set so far at liberty.

The third man withdrew immediately, then, closing the door with a clang, and when the detective got upon his feet he was alone and in total darkness.

"Well, here is a pretty go," he said to himself. "Am I the (said to be) renowned Duke Daniels, detective? If I am, guess I had better retire from the business and go to blacking stoves for a living. I seem to be in retirement now, though, with strong indications pointing to the probability of my staying retired for a time."

"I would like to get even with the fellow who gave me this lump on the back of my head. It does not feel by any means pleasant. Perhaps I shall get a turn at him some time. The first thing to be thought of, however, is how to get out of this mess."

He felt around to get some knowledge of his situation.

His hands were secure enough, and so was his foot. The chain that held him was strong, and it was secured to a ring in one side of his prison. He could touch three of the walls, but could not get to the door. The walls were of stone.

On the floor at the end of his cell he found a bundle of clean straw, and knowing how useless it would be for him to walk the floor all night, he threw himself down upon it, and after a little while he was asleep.

When he awoke it was day, and his cell was faintly lighted by means of a very small window high up in the wall over his humble bed of straw.

He got up and stretched himself, and in a little while he heard some one coming down the stairs. In a moment more the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PLAN FOR ESCAPE.

THE detective stood facing the door, anxious to see what manner of person his visitor would prove to be.

The door opened, and a burly negro appeared.

He was as black as the blackest, and looked like an ugly customer.

"Good-mornin' sah," he saluted.

"Good-morning," the detective responded civilly.

As the black spoke he stepped in where the

light fell stronger upon him, and the detective saw that he had on a belt with a revolver in it ready for instant emergency.

"How did you sleep, sah?" the darky inquired.

"Oh, very good, I guess," was the cheerful answer.

Daniels saw that this fellow was his jailer, and knew that it would be much to his interest to make friends with him if possible.

"I is glad to hear dat, sah," the fellow commented; "an' now I reckons you is ready for somethin' to eat, sah."

"By the way I feel, I guess I am," said Daniels. "By the way," he asked, "what is your name? I don't know what to call you."

"My name's Jack, sah. Jest call me Jack, an' it will be all right."

"Very well, Jack, you may bring my breakfast as soon as you please."

"I'll bring it right off quick, sah. I have got water and towel out here, sah, if you want to wash."

"By Georgel there is nothing mean about you, Jack!" the prisoner exclaimed heartily. "Trot it right in, sir, and I'll wash up. I like a wash in the morning almost as much as I like my breakfast."

The black stepped out and brought in a basin and a pitcher of water, together with a towel, and put them within the detective's reach.

"I expect it will be rather inconvenient to wash with all this jewelry on," the detective observed, indicating the handcuffs, "but perhaps I can manage it somehow or other."

"You will git used to dat," Jack predicted.

"According to that you have taken me for a regular boarder," commented the detective.

The darky grinned.

"I guess you is booked for some time, sah," he informed.

"If that is the case I may as well begin by making myself right at home, I suppose, so here goes."

Having prepared his basin for washing, the detective soused into it.

"Yes, dat is about de most sensiblest thing you kin do, sah," the darky agreed; "an' while you is washin'," he added, "I will go and git your grub."

"All right, Jack. You seem like a good sort of fellow, and I like you already. I guess we'll get along till my time is out."

The sable fellow grinned again, and went out and locked the door.

"I hardly expect to gain anything so far as that chap is concerned," the detective commented, "but it will do no harm to have his good will."

He went on and washed, and shortly after he had finished, the darky returned with quite a tempting breakfast.

"Jack, you're a jewel!" Daniels exclaimed. "That coffee smells good. I see you do not mean to let me starve while I am in your care."

"No, sah; dem's de orders, sah. You is to hab everything you wants, and as long as you habes yourself you an' me will get along all right."

"Oh, I have no doubt about that, Jack. I suppose I had better behave, too; for I see you carry a shooter with you."

"Yes, sah; dat's de order, sah. If you goes to cuttin' up too high, or to tryin' ter git away, den I is to bore a hole in you, quick."

"Is it possible? But, you wouldn't do it, would you?"

"Don't you try me, dat's all. I don't want ter do it, sah, goodness knows; but jest so sure as you tries ter git out ob heah, jest so shua you gits killed."

This was said in a manner that was deeply earnest.

"Well, Jack, as I don't want you to do any target-practice with me, I will be just as good as I can."

"I hopes you will, sah."

"You will allow me to ask a few questions, I suppose?" the detective interrogated, as he proceeded with his breakfast.

"You kin ask as many as you wants to," was the response, "but I kain't answer any of 'em. I is not ter tell you anything, sah."

"Can't even tell me whose house I am in?"

"No, sah."

"Nor who your master is?"

"No, sah."

"Nor what street the house is on?"

"No, sah; kain't tell you nothin', sah."

"Well, there's no use in my wasting any more breath that way, then. I can tell you something, though, Jack."

"What am dat, sah?"

"This coffee is mighty good, and I feel just like trying another cup of it."

"You kin hab as many as you wants, sah."

"And you may carry my compliments to the cook, and tell her that her cooking is quite immense."

The black grinned from ear to ear.

"De cook am right here," he declared.

"What! you the cook?" the detective exclaimed.

"I am de chief cook an' bottle-washer ob de 'stablishment, sah," he informed.

"Jack, you are a genius."

Highly flattered, the darky went for the coffee.

"One point gained, anyhow," the detective commented. "He is probably the only person in the house. I notice that it is as still as a graveyard overhead. Well, I will make haste slowly, and perhaps the way of escape will open up all in good time."

The darky returned with the coffee, and while the detective went on with his breakfast he kept him grinning from ear to ear with his talk.

When he was done the things were taken away, and the jailer soon returned again to know if anything was wanted. If not, he said, he would not come down again till he came with the dinner, unless called.

Daniels asked if he might have a smoke.

The darky disappeared, soon coming back with a box of cigars.

"You kin smoke all you wants to," he informed.

"Bully for you!" the detective exclaimed. "Take my respects to your master, and tell him that I am smoking to his health."

The black grinned, and having told his prisoner how to summon him if he was wanted, went away.

Some hours passed, during which the detective had done his best to kill the time, trying the while to think of some means of escape; and then the darky was heard coming down the stairs again.

He came to the cell, opened the door and entered.

"Here is a letter for you from de boss, sah," he announced.

"Hal a letter, oh?"

"Yes, sah."

A thought came to the detective. He had been wondering whether the darky could read, and here was a chance to find out, perhaps.

"Well, open it and read it for me, Jack," he requested; "I am too lazy to get up."

He was reclining on the bed of straw.

"I'd do it, sah," was the response, "but de fact am, sah, I can't read."

Another point!

"Oh, well, if that is the case I shall have to excuse you, of course," said Daniels; and getting up he took the letter and tore it open.

The message it contained was as follows:

MR. DUKE DANIELS, *Detective* :—

"Sir:—You now know the consequences of your not heeding the warnings that were given you. You are likely to remain where you are for some time to come. No one knows where you are; you can get word to no one; you cannot possibly escape. Should you try to escape, your jailer will shoot you as sure as you live. Such is his order. Take warning this time and do not attempt it. You will be taken good care of, and when the Russellford matter will no longer require your attention, you will be set at liberty. In the mean time enjoy yourself the best you can.

Yours determinedly,
"I. C. ALLTHINGS."

While reading, the detective thought of another little ruse to play upon the darky.

Holding the letter up more to the light, he looked at it closely, staring as though there was something that he could not make out.

"What the dickens is this name?" he questioned, as though to himself.

He hoped that he would catch the black off his guard, and that he would supply his master's real name.

"What can it be?" he repeated. "Hang me if I can make it out. Do you know what name it is, Jack?" as the darky offered no suggestion.

"No, I kain't tell," was the response. "I know it kain't be de boss's real name, for he swore he'd kill me if I let dat out."

The ruse was a failure. The darky was not to be caught that time.

"Oh, well, it don't matter," Daniels dismissed; "we know who it is from, and that is enough. Has your boss been here, Jack?"

"Yes, sah; he was here to 'quire after you, sah."

"And of course you told him that I am all right."

"Oh, shua. But he might know dat, sah, when you is in my charge, sah. He knows me, sah."

"Yes, I should say he must."

The darky went away, and the detective fell again to musing, trying still to study up some means of escape.

He had made one or two good points against his jailer, without the latter being any the wiser. He had learned that he was, quite probably, the only person in the house; and he knew, if the darky had told the truth, that he could not read.

The last point he considered a good one. Could he not make use of it in some way? He must give it careful thought.

Careful thought he did give it, and finally he hit upon a plan.

It was a simple one, but if it worked well it would be effective.

On the morrow he would pretend to be sick. He would tell the darky that he must have a certain kind of medicine immediately, or death would be the result. He would request the darky to procure it for him. He would tell him some jaw-breaking names that he could not pos-

sibly utter. Finally he would have to write it. What he would write would be a message to one of his men, which he would request the druggist to forward with all possible haste.

It was simple enough, but would it work?

CHAPTER XX.

THE WILES OF A SIREN.

HENRY RUSSELLFORD was like a man living in a dream.

He could scarcely eat or sleep, and looked haggard and worn.

It was not to be wondered at. Deprived of child and wife in so sudden and mysterious a manner, and with the awful suspicion against his wife's faithfulness forced upon him, it was more a wonder that he had been able to bear up as well as he had.

During the forenoon of the day following his last recorded interview with the detective, he called again at the office of Duke Daniels.

He was told that the detective had not been in yet that morning, but was expected, as he had arranged to meet some of his men there at nine o'clock to confer with them regarding a case.

The men were on hand, and as it was then after ten, they wondered what could be detaining their chief.

Mr. Russellford waited around till nearly noon, when, tired of waiting, he went away.

In the afternoon he called again, but Daniels had not been heard from yet, and the men had decided to go ahead on their own judgment, since now they would not know when to look for him.

They believed that he had gone out of the city, perhaps following a clew that had come suddenly to his notice, but they did not think that he had met with any mishap.

Mr. Russellford returned home again, this time comforted with the hope that perhaps the detective had discovered something important in his own case.

When he reached the house he found a letter awaiting him.

It was directed in a woman's hand, and the writing had a familiar look, but he could not guess whose it was.

Opening the letter and glancing at the signature, he gave a start of surprise and exclaimed:

"From Zara Royal! What can she have to say to me?"

He lost no time in ascertaining. Spreading out the letter he read as follow:

"MR. HENRY RUSSELFORD:—

"Sir:—I feel called upon to write to you, though under any other circumstances than the present nothing could induce me to do so. Our once—shall I call it friendly?—relations make me have an interest in your present sorrow, and believing that I can throw some light upon the mystery, I consider it my duty to do it. Have you no suspicion that your wife has been untrue to you? How much do you know of her past life previous to your meeting her first? Would it surprise you to learn that she loves another better than yourself? If you will call and see me I will tell you something that will open your eyes, and that will at the same time put you on the track of your unfaithful wife. If you could only see her you would not think she cares much for you. I would make this communication anonymous and tell you all, but I would detest myself for such a course. If you would know more, call and see me.

"Respectfully yours,
"ZARA ROYAL."

As he finished reading, Mr. Russellford crushed the letter in his hand and sunk down upon a chair.

His spirit was wounded.

Well did he remember Zara Royal, though he had not thought of her in years. He remembered that once he had almost loved her, perhaps had loved her a little, but he had loved his wife more at first sight.

Something in the pure face of Corinne had supplanted Zara immediately.

He saw by the address she gave that she had changed her residence since he had seen her last.

Should he go and see her? Could there be any truth in what she said? Was she not mistaken? He read the letter over again.

It was plain and straightforward enough, characteristic of the woman it was from, and as she had never met him since his marriage, except casually, he was led to think that she was sincere in what she said, mistaken though she might—must—be.

Yes, he would go and see her, and that immediately. Nothing must keep him from going. Anything that promised to solve the mystery must be investigated without delay.

Go! All the powers of the dark world could not have kept him from going. It was no question of doubt in the mind of Zara Royal; she knew he would come to her.

Within half an hour he rung the bell at the address she had given.

"Is Miss Royal at home?" he asked.

"Yes; come right in, sir," was the answer.

Zara had been looking for him, and seeing him coming, had told the servant to admit him immediately without question.

There was no delay; barely sooner was the door opened than Henry Russellford went in, as though he was no stranger there.

There was method in this.

As soon as the door was closed the servant ushered him into a small reception-room on the right of the hall, where he found Zara seated at one of the windows.

At sight of him she sprung up quickly as though eager to greet him, but she checked herself and extended her hand formally.

"I am glad to see you," she said.

He touched her hand, said something in response, and at her invitation sat down.

"It is not necessary to ask you if you received my note," Zara observed, coming at once to the point.

"It is that that has brought me here," was the return. "While I am sure that you must be mistaken, Za—Miss Royal, still I must know all that you can tell me. It may at least throw some light upon the dark mystery."

"It will throw much light upon it," was the assurance. "I wish I were mistaken, for your sake, but you must know that I am sure of what I am saying, as my sending for you should prove."

"Yes, I believe you are sincere. But enlighten me. Do not keep me a moment in suspense. This awful uncertainty is killing me."

"You will allow me to speak plainly?"

"Yes, yes; the plainer the better, perhaps."

"So I believe. If I say more than I ought, though, pardon me. I am only a woman, and my feelings— But let me begin again."

The handsome face was flushed, love shone in the eyes, and she was doing all in her power to make him read her secret.

"This trouble of yours is no more than I expected when you married that almost unknown girl," she continued.

"You expected it?"

"I feared it."

"Why, what did you know?"

"I knew nothing; I suspected much."

"And you did not tell me— But, there, I am too hasty. I cannot believe anything against her who is my wife, without proof positive."

"No, I did not tell you. How could I? She was my rival— Oh! if I could be spared this humiliation! She was my rival, and to speak ill of her would have been of no avail with you. My motive would have been misunderstood."

"But you can tell me now."

"Yes; but you demand proofs. How can I supply them?"

"I do not know. Supply them you must, though, if you expect your story to have weight with me."

"Why should I care whether it has weight or not? I can only put before you such evidence as I have, as doing you a favor. Why I have this much interest in the matter you ought to guess."

As she said this she was looking at the floor, and Mr. Russellford had to speak to rouse her up.

"But, what is this matter?" he demanded.

"Oh! pardon me. My thoughts turned from it, Henry—I mean Mr. Russellford. I was thinking of the past. I believe there was some secret connected with your wife's past life that she has kept carefully hid from you, which, had you known it, would have been a barrier to your union with her."

Henry Russellford paced the floor.

"What that secret was, I do not pretend to know," the siren went on, "but I believe that it existed, and that all through your married life your pretty wife has been corresponding with some person without your knowledge."

This was but a random shot, but it struck home. That secret letter from the young man—Max Barrows—came into Mr. Russellford's mind. Did the woman know anything about him?

"Do you know anything about such a correspondence?" he demanded.

"No," was the acknowledgment, "I do not."

"Then how dare you insinuate such a thing?"

The tone was anything but gentle.

"I think I have said enough," observed the woman, coolly. "You do not seem to realize that you are in the presence of a lady, a woman who humiliates herself to do you a favor because she—well, because she once counted you her friend."

"Pardon me, Zara," Mr. Russellford said, throwing himself down upon his chair again, "I ought to appreciate your kindness more. I believe that your intentions are for the best. You cannot understand how I feel, though."

"I am afraid that I can, and only too well," in a low tone.

Mr. Russellford looked at her keenly. He read her thoughts. She loved him—had loved him all the time.

"Can you tell me anything more?" he asked.

"I should not have invited you to come here," the woman said, "for I fear I have made a blunder of trying to hide my emotions. Pray forget anything I may have said. Yes, I can tell you more. Only yesterday I saw your wife and child ride past in a carriage in company with a gentleman. I never saw her look happier. It was about this hour, too, and— Ha! look there, look there!"

She had been glancing out the window now and then, and suddenly she uttered the exclamation quoted, pointing out excitedly.

Henry Russellford sprang forward to look.

A carriage was just passing. In it, on one seat, was his child, as bright and laughing as he had ever seen her. On the back seat, beside a good-looking young man, who had his arm thrown over the back of the seat and his hand on her shoulder, sat—his wife!

It was only a momentary view, but he could not be mistaken. Not only did he recognize their faces, but their clothing as well.

His head grew dizzy, black objects swam before his eyes, and he had to grasp a chair for support. At the same time the beautiful siren caught him in her arms, as though fearing he would fall.

It was but momentary, however. With an effort he recovered and sprang for the door.

"Hurry!" the siren exclaimed; "you may be able to follow them!"

Mr. Russellford jerked at the door desperately, but it refused to yield. It was locked, and on the outside.

CHAPTER XXI.

HENRY RUSSELLFORD WARNED.

It was an important and exciting moment.

In a few seconds the carriage would be out of sight, and the trail would be as completely lost as though the missing ones had not been seen.

"The door is fast!" Mr. Russellford exclaimed. "Open it quick, or it will be too late!"

The reader will readily see that this was a part of her plan.

Knowing that Henry Russellford would start to follow the carriage the moment he saw it, she had told the servant to turn the key in the lock as soon as he had entered the room.

The servant had obeyed, and so the situation stood.

"Surely it cannot be locked," Zara protested; "pull it hard."

Russellford pulled as hard as he could, but the door was not to be moved.

"I shall lose sight of them!" he cried. "Is there no other way out of here? I must get out. Who has done this?"

"This is the only way out, as the piano is against the other door," the woman informed, excitedly. "I will call a servant to unlock it, for it must be that that mischievous boy of my housekeeper's has turned the key in the lock."

She sprang to a bell and rung it sharply.

There was a delay of almost half a minute, and then the hurried steps of a servant were heard.

As soon as she reached the door, the servant took hold of the knob and tried to come in, still carrying out the deception.

"The door is locked on the outside," her mistress hastily informed; "unlock it as quickly as you can."

"The key is gone, ma'am," was the response.

Henry Russellford groaned. It was of little use to be in a hurry now, he knew.

"Find it," Zara imperiously ordered. "That boy has had it, and he must know where it is."

There was another delay of a few moments, and then the servant was heard to exclaim:

"Oh! here it is!"

Immediately, then, the door was opened, but the time for its usefulness had passed.

Russellford ran quickly out, however, and looked up the avenue, but the carriage was nowhere to be seen.

The siren had followed him to the door, and as he turned back into the house she laid her hand on his arm.

"It is too bad," she said, as they returned to the room, "and I am very sorry. Had it not been for that boy, you would have been able to follow them and learn the whole truth for yourself."

"I cannot understand it," Russellford muttered, more to himself than to her. "I cannot believe the evidence of my own eyes. Can it be that they were indeed my wife and child?"

"How can you ask that?" Zara responded.

"If I recognized them yesterday at first sight, surely you ought to be sure of your own recognition of them."

"Oh, it was they, beyond a doubt," the unhappy man admitted, "but it is hard to understand what they are doing out riding. Would my wife not be more likely to want to keep out of sight, were the conditions such as you would have me believe?"

This was a point well taken, and it was a weak spot in the scheme.

"There is no accounting for what such a woman would or would not do," returned the siren.

"Such a woman!" repeated Russellford; "have a care how you speak of her. She is my wife, and you must remember that you have proven nothing against her character."

Zara Royal trembled for a moment, inwardly.

"Pardon me," she hastened to say, "I did not mean to wound your feelings. I could not help speaking as I did, and it was understood that I was to speak plainly."

"But, if you make such insinuations you must back them with proof."

"How can you talk of proof?" Zara asked.

"Have you not seen enough to convince you? Your wife has mysteriously gone from your

home, taking your child with her, and all the clothing of both. You see her and the child riding out in a carriage in the company of another man, with whom your wife seems to be on the most intimate terms. What are we to think?"

"I know not what to think," Russellford groaned.

"I pity you, oh! how I pity you!" the false-hearted creature said, in most sympathetic tones. "How much better it would have been if you had never seen her! How much better it would have been if she had never come between— But, what am I saying?"

Turning quickly away, she buried her face in her hands and walked to the other end of the room.

Henry Russellford could but gaze after her in amazement.

In the bygone time she had loved him, that he believed; but to think that she still loved him, that she had never ceased to love him, this was new.

He could but pity her, but he might not do even that, in words.

"Miss Royal," he said as quietly as he could, "pray calm yourself and let us bring this painful interview to an end."

"You rightly name it," she said, turning. "It is more painful than you are aware."

She came back and stood before him.

Her eyes were strained, though tearless, and her face was slightly flushed.

"No one knows better than I how painful it really is," he responded. "Your heart is not being torn as mine is. Put yourself in my place, if you can, and try to imagine what I am suffering."

"I do not have to put myself in your place to know what suffering is," was the quick answer. "I have known what it is for a long time, Henry Russellford. Oh! why am I speaking thus? Why did I allow you to come here?"

She sat down, again covering her face.

Mr. Russellford rose to go. He could not mistake the woman's emotion, so plainly put forth, and he knew that the interview must end immediately.

"I must go," he said. "Perhaps even yet, by inquiry, I may be able to find some trace of that carriage."

She turned back to him, her eyes flashing.

"No, you must not go,—shall not go, until you have heard what I must say," she poured forth in hurried, passionate words.

They were standing in a window, and as she spoke she stepped up to him and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"I have said so much that I have no choice but to go on and say more, and set myself right in your eyes," she went on. "Knowing what I did, I considered it my duty to tell you, and I have done so. You have seen for yourself. No doubt we meet for the last time. If it is so, then let me tell you, Henry Russellford, that there is one heart in the world that is true to you forever, and that heart is mine. There, now you know all I can tell you. If you despise me I cannot help it."

He gently removed her hands and drew away.

"You must forget me," he said. "I do not despise you for the confession, but you must dismiss me from your mind forever."

"Never!" she exclaimed. "And," she added, "when you come to know how false that woman has been to you, then you will think of me. Now, go!"

Without another word he turned and left the room, glad to have the interview at an end, but she followed him to the door.

"Will you not say good-by?" she asked, as he stepped out upon the stoop.

He turned, and she held out her hand.

"Yes," he responded; "good-by, Miss Royal," and he took her hand, touching his hat at the same time.

It was his intention just to touch her hand, as he had done at meeting her, but the moment their hands met she grasped his and held it fast while she said:

"If I could restore your lost ones to you, Henry, blameless, gladly would I do so. My love is not selfish, though it be hopeless."

Then she let him go, and he, with a last formal polite salutation with his hat, turned and walked rapidly away.

His mind was all in a jumble. He could not think rationally upon anything for the time being.

Could he have done so he might have reasoned out much of what he had seen and heard.

The woman had called him to her to tell him something, as she had said, but she had told him nothing. She had hinted at much, but nothing more. Not one statement had she made, except that regarding the carriage.

But he could not think it out. He remembered what she said about his wife's having carried on a secret correspondence, and the detective's information about the mysterious Max Barrows supplied the rest of that.

Was it possible that his wife was false? His heart told him that it was not, but in his head was the terrible doubt. When he tried to reason it out without bias, then it confused him and he had to let it go on in its mad dance of faith and doubt, belief and unbelief.

He went again to the office of the detective. Here was something that must be told him as soon as possible.

The detective was not yet in, and had not been heard from.

Mr. Russelford left word for him to come to his house immediately upon his return, and went home.

The room up-stairs, the one from which his child and wife had so strangely disappeared, had a wonderful fascination for him. He spent much of his time there.

It was to that room that he repaired now.

The room was kept locked, the key being left in the lock on the outside, and he turned the key and went in.

Throwing himself upon a chair, he tried to think, taking one link of the great paradox at a time. There was the mystery of how the missing ones had got out of the room, leaving it still locked. There was the question of motive, supposing his wife had gone of her own free will. There was the even greater problem, looking at it in the light of abduction. The Max Barrows affair, too, was another link.

Needless to say he made little headway. Every train of thought led finally to the great dead wall of mystery.

He had been thinking—or trying to think—for some time, looking idly around the room the while, when suddenly he saw a piece of paper lying on a little table near a window.

It had not been there when he was in the room before, for he had then used the table.

Going to the table, he found the paper to be a sheet, folded, and on the top of it was a bullet that did duty as a weight. Taking it up—the paper, he opened it and read:

MR. RUSSELFORD:

"Sir:—Your detective has retired from the case permanently. You had better give right up. If you do not, it may be the worse for you. Be wise, and be content to let well enough alone. You are better off not to know the truth. Be warned."

"Believe me, I. C. ALLTHINGS."

CHAPTER XXII.

CORINNE CONVINCED.

On the morning of the day of which the previous chapter treats, Mrs. Russelford received a surprise.

She was romping with her child, thus trying to keep up her spirits and at the same time gain a little exercise, when the woman who had charge of her came into the room.

"I am glad to see you so cheerful," the woman greeted.

"It is only a forced cheerfulness," was the response.

"Well, it will do you no harm anyhow. And now I have come to grant one of your oft-repeated requests."

"What is that?" Mrs. Russelford asked, eagerly enough.

"You may write a short letter to your husband, if you desire."

"Oh! may I?" with genuine delight.

"Yes. I will bring you the materials. Bear in mind, however, what I have hinted to you: that is, that your husband is untrue to you. Do not mention a word of that suspicion in your letter, however, but say to him this: 'If you desire to rescue me, follow the bearer of this and find where I am. Or at any rate answer by the bearer. I am held a prisoner.'"

"I will word it just as you say," promised the poor wife; "only let me write him."

"You shall do so. I will return in a few minutes."

The woman went away then, leaving her prisoner in a peculiar frame of mind. Had the woman taken pity upon her, and was she trying to lead to her rescue?

These questions came to her mind, and an answer in the affirmative seemed entirely reasonable.

She would question her later.

In a little time the woman returned, bringing paper, pen and ink, and Mrs. Russelford set about the pleasant privilege immediately.

Could her note have reached her husband, it would have shown him that she was far from untrue to him. It was too long to be quoted here, but it told her story in a brief way, and ended in about the manner the woman had indicated.

There was method in this ruse on the part of the conspirators. There were two motives involved, and two issues at stake.

These, perhaps already guessed by the reader, will be shown further on.

When the letter was finished, Mrs. Russelford called the woman, as had been agreed upon, and put it into her hands unsealed.

"You have not sealed it," the woman remarked.

"I did not intend to," was the answer. "I believe you are my friend, and I have said nothing that you may not see."

"You are right in saying that I am your friend," was the response to that, "but I will seal the letter none the less, as it is to go into other hands to be carried to its destination."

As she said this, the woman sealed the letter.

"Why is it that you have finally consented to

allow me to write to my husband?" Mrs. Russelford asked.

"My child, can you not guess?" was the counter-question.

"No," said Corinne, "unless you are my friend indeed, and have taken pity on me and mean to help me out of this prison."

The woman embraced and kissed her.

"You have still all faith in your husband?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Corinne, "I have."

"And you have asked him to come and rescue you, or at any rate to answer your letter?"

"Yes."

"And you certainly believe he will do one or both?"

"Yes, I believe he will."

"Poor heart! I hope your trust is not misplaced, but I fear. Suppose he does neither one nor the other, what will you think then?"

"I shall have to think that he did not get my letter."

"Oh, but he will get the letter; it shall be put right into his own hands."

"Well, I would not know what to think."

"No, poor child, you would not know what to think, but I would. Now, I am your friend, and if your husband is inclined to get you out of here, I shall not stand in his way. If he pays no attention to your letter, then I shall know that he has tired of you, and that it is through him that you are here."

Corinne's eyes opened wide.

"Can you mean to say that it is through him that I have been put here?" she repeated in interrogation.

"I do not say that it is so," the woman evaded, "but if you knew all that I know, you would not consider it unlikely."

"And what is it you know? Oh! madam, will you not tell you me all?"

"I may be able to convince you, ere many days, by allowing you to see certain things for yourself. I hope I am mistaken, and that this letter will bring your husband to you, but I fear that it will be otherwise. There, now, do not ask anything more at present. I will go and send your letter right off, and this afternoon I will come in and talk with you."

With that she went out, leaving the wife's brain all in a whirl, closing and locking the door after her.

When she returned at lunch-time, she said:

"Mrs. Russelford, get your little girl ready to go out for a short ride, and I will come for her in about an hour."

"No, no," Corinne exclaimed, quickly, "she must not go. I cannot let her go out of my sight again, indeed I cannot."

"She must go," the woman declared. "Such are my instructions, and I must follow them. It will do her good, and I give you my word that she will be returned to you in a little while."

"No, no, please do not part us," the mother pleaded.

"It is not as I wish, but as I am ordered to do," said the woman. "My employer has told me to have the child ready, and it must be done. If you will not prepare her, then I must do it myself."

"You promise me faithfully that she will be brought back?"

"I do, Mrs. Russelford."

"Well, I will trust you. I think I can do so, since you have done me one kindness."

"You may trust me fully, and you will not regret it. While the child is out I will come and talk with you as I promised."

"Well, I will have her ready."

At the appointed time little Eulalie was ready, and the woman came and took her away, Corinne kissing her as though fearful that the woman's promise would not be kept.

Some time later the woman returned to the room, and drew a chair up to the window where her prisoner was sitting.

"Well," she observed, "your husband has not come, nor has he answered your letter."

"No," Corinne acknowledged, sorrowfully.

"And you do not know what to think?"

"No, I do not know what to think. It is so hard to believe anything wrong of him."

"What remark do you suppose he made when your letter was handed to him?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I will tell you. I told the messenger to remember and tell me. He took the letter, tore it open and read it, and when he had done so he tore it in half, threw it upon the floor, and exclaimed: 'The soft little fool!'"

Mrs. Russelford's face flushed painfully.

"I am telling you the truth," the woman went on. "This little incident will prove more to you than I could tell you in a day. You can understand that something has happened to draw his love away from you. He said there would be no answer, and so my messenger had nothing to do but come back. It shows, also, that your husband knows well enough where you are."

"It is so hard to realize that it can be true," muttered Corinne.

"Yes, I have no doubt it is, poor dear, but it is better for you to know the truth, I think. Now there is something that I would ask you."

"What is that?"

"Do you know a person named Zara Royal?"

Corinne started, and her eyes flashed.

"Yes," she answered; "what of her?"

"Do you think that it can be she who has robbed you of your husband's love?"

The poor wife burst into tears.

"I do not know, I do not know," she sobbed.

"Oh, if you know anything about him, why do you not tell me at once?"

"I will do so. That is what I came here for. Your pretty face and innocent way have touched my heart, and I will hold nothing back from you. This Zara Royal whom I have mentioned lives just across the way here, that house yonder; and I have seen your husband call there frequently."

Jealousy in the wife's heart was aroused at last. Corinne's eyes flashed fire as she demanded:

"Are you sure it was he?"

"I am quite sure," the woman affirmed. "I know Mr. Russelford, and I know that I am not mistaken."

"But, perhaps he has had business there," Corinne said, still trying to find some excuse.

The woman smiled. Her manner was such as to indicate that she had no such idea as that.

"What business could he have there?" she demanded. "His business is love, as I am sure. But, you may be able to see for yourself ere many days. Ah! there is Miss Royal, now at the window."

Corinne looked, and true enough the handsome woman was seated at one of the front windows, looking out idly.

"If all is true that you have said and hinted at," Corinne observed, "it is strange that my husband has placed me here where I might see his doings."

There was force in this, and the woman saw that her prisoner was not without reasoning power.

"I do not pretend to know what his motive in that is," the woman returned, "but I do know that I have spoken only the truth. It is hard to convince you, but of course I cannot wonder at that. I wish you might see for yourself and then—Ha! see there! Do you know that man?"

Corinne looked out, and there was her husband coming up the street. She watched him, and her heart turned sick when she saw him spring lightly up the steps of Zara Royal's house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CLOVEN HOOF APPEARS.

"ARE you convinced now?" the woman asked, as Corinne sat and looked with fixed stare, unable to move or speak.

There was no response.

"Watch, now," the woman said, "and you may see more."

The door of the house opposite was quickly opened, and Henry Russelford was seen to enter immediately, as though he was quite at home there.

"Look at the woman, now," Corinne's keeper directed.

The poor wife could not help doing so.

Suddenly Zara was seen to spring up and run from the window.

"See how eagerly she greets him!" the Jezebel exclaimed, putting Corinne's bated thoughts into words.

Presently Zara resumed her seat, and it could be seen that she was talking to some one, though that person was not in sight.

As she talked she glanced frequently out the window, as though it were a habit with her to do so.

"You see what agreeable companions they are," the woman at Corinne's side hinted. "See how pleased and animated the handsome creature looks."

Corinne saw all, she could not help seeing. Her eyes were kept in that direction by a power she could not have controlled had she wanted to.

For some little time the situation remained unchanged, but at last Zara, who had continued to glance out the window, was seen suddenly to start, turn to her companion, and at the same time to point to the street.

"What can she see?" queried Corinne.

The reader knows what it was she saw. From her position the fair prisoner could not see the carriage. It was on the same side of the street she was on, and she was just out of range of vision at her window.

"I do not know," answered the woman. "It is something that interests them both, however, for, see, your husband comes to her side."

Henry Russelford was seen to come to the window, and his face was seen to take on an expression of almost fear. He seemed to stagger slightly, and laid his hand on a chair. At the same time Zara put her arms about him. The next instant they had gone out of sight.

Corinne was almost crazed with what she saw. Here was proof that could not be doubted; the evidence of her own eyes.

Some minutes passed, and then the front door of the house was seen to open suddenly, and Henry Russelford stepped out upon the stoop, bareheaded, and looked up the avenue. Zara followed him and stood in the door.

For a moment the man looked, and then

turned back to the house, and as he did so the wife saw her suspected rival lay her hand upon his arm.

The door closed behind them, and for a little time neither of them was seen. Presently, however, they appeared at the window as before, but were this time standing.

Mr. Russellford appeared first, and then came Zara and laid her hands upon his shoulders, looking up into his face.

Corinne's heart was almost breaking, but soon one little thing gave her a ray of suspicion that her husband might be innocent after all. She saw him remove the woman's hands from his shoulders and draw away from her.

Corinne made no comment upon this to her companion, and the woman looked to see if she had noted it. It was something that should not have happened, according to the plans laid, but it was something that Zara Royal could not have foreseen.

The pair disappeared, and soon Mr. Russellford came out to go.

Corinne saw that Zara came to the door with him, and she saw what followed. Their hands met, were clasped for several seconds, and finally with a polite bow her husband went away.

When it was all ended Corinne burst into tears.

"Now," said the woman at her side, "you have seen. It is not necessary for me to tell you anything more."

It was some time before Corinne could command her voice to say anything in response.

"I do not want to hear anything more," she said at length. "I am perfectly miserable."

"And who can wonder at it; but, my dear, now that you know the truth you can hear it better than you could the uncertainty, I am sure."

"No, for it will kill me," the unhappy wife declared.

"You must not let it," the woman urged. "You must escape from here in some way, of which we will talk later; and you must show your faithless husband and your rival that they have not crushed you. Oh, no, you will not die; you will live to defy them."

Corinne was silent.

"Think of what has been done you, of how you have been wronged," the woman reminded.

"Would not revenge be sweet?"

"But, how am I to know it is all true?" Corinne questioned. "I saw my husband there, but I did not hear their conversation. I may be doing him the greatest injustice."

The woman laughed.

"I do not know what more you can ask," she remarked. "Here you have been put away from the man you love, and he has put a great mystery around it all in order to escape suspicion. With my help you have written to him, and how did he receive your letter? He threw it upon the floor, calling you a soft little fool. You have seen where his love lies."

"But are you quite sure that your messenger reported truthfully?" Corinne asked.

"I am sure that I received nothing but the truth from him," the woman assured. "He is a person to be trusted."

"Still," Corinne made bold, bound to voice a suspicion that had come to her, "what proof have I that you yourself are my friend, as you claim to be?"

The woman looked pained.

"You have no proof," she answered, "except my bare word, if you are inclined to be suspicious of me. I hope to be able to remove suspicion from your mind before long, however. I have grown to like you, as I have said, and I shall try to help you to escape."

"Pardon my mean thought of you," Corinne hastened to apologize. "I hardly know what I am thinking or saying. If you will hasten my escape from here, madam, you will earn my undying gratitude."

"I seek no reward, Mrs. Russellford, but I do want to see you bring those guilty ones to grief. It pains me to see you so wronged."

"What is to hinder my escaping immediately?"

"Ah, you do not know the place you are in. I, myself, am watched, and am no less a prisoner than you. I cannot help you to escape immediately, now that we are sure that your husband is against you. Have I not already run one risk in having your letter taken to him? I hoped against hope that he might be innocent, and learning where you are, come to your rescue. But my suspicions were only confirmed. As I hinted at first, he is your worst enemy."

Again the prisoner could not hold back her tears.

"I must find some one to help us," the woman went on. "You cannot imagine how I am situated, and I cannot tell you. It may be a week before I can act. It may be longer. In the mean time, however, you can be sure that you will receive the very best of care and attention at my hands."

"How is it that you have not more direct proof against my husband, if it is by his orders that I am held here?" Corinne asked.

It was a shrewd question, but the woman was equal to it.

"I think that is easily explained," she made an-

swer. "Your husband evidently does not want his treachery to be known to you. He deals through a third person in carrying out his plans. I am kept in as much ignorance as yourself."

"But, who is the person who employs you?" Corinne persisted.

"Ah! that is something I may not tell. Would that I could take you into my heart and make you my confidante, but I cannot do so. And now that our conversation has taken a turn so painful to me, I will bring it to an end. I will bring your child to you as soon as ever she returns."

She rose abruptly while speaking, and when she ended was at the door.

"Pray do not go yet," Corinne pleaded; "I will not mention the matter that is distasteful to you. We will talk only of my own griefs."

"No, no, I cannot stay longer now. I may be suspected of having too much friendship for you, and that would lessen the chances I might have of helping you."

This was said in a low tone. As she concluded, the woman opened the door and passed out.

Mrs. Russellford was left alone with her harrowing thoughts.

What her thoughts were is hard to define. They could hardly be called thoughts at all, but were more like random ideas and impressions without any order in them. Such, in fact, they were.

Looking over her married life, she could not find a thing to indicate that her husband did not love her, or that he was ceasing to love her. Their union had been, to her, one of unalloyed happiness.

This made it all the stranger that the change should have come so suddenly and so unexpected. No, she could not believe—But, had she not seen for herself? Was she to doubt what her own eyes had revealed to her understanding?

She sat for a long time in silence, but in the end had made the mysterious affair no clearer than it had been at first.

After an absence of about two hours, little Eulalie was brought back to the room, and her mother received her gladly enough.

The child was flushed with the healthful outing, and came in chattering like a magpie.

"You see I have kept my word with you," the woman remarked to Corinne. "Here is your little darling, safe and sound."

"Yes, and I believe I can trust you," the prisoner returned, "though I must confess that I was afraid that I should not see her again."

"I cannot blame you for being suspicious. You will know me better ere long, however."

She went out, leaving the mother to remove the child's street attire, and as Corinne was thus engaged the child chatted away about the splendid drive she had enjoyed.

The rest of the day passed without event worthy of record, but the evening brought a letter for Corinne.

She opened it with breathless haste, hoping that it might be from her husband, but it was not. The signature it bore was—Anthon Marchmont.

The letter was too long to be quoted, but its substance can be given in few words. The writer said that he had learned, by chance, of the perfidy of Henry Russellford, and of Corinne's place of imprisonment. If she would allow him to do so, he was willing to help her. He awaited her reply, hinting that she held a place in his heart, for the sake of which he would like to be of service to her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TWO BUMMERS' PLAN.

"WHY, if here ain't my pard Dob Ritters!"

"And if it ain't my old mate, Job Barrows!"

With these exclamations the two bummers rushed together and embraced.

It was in a saloon. Job Barrows was already there. Enter Dob Ritters.

Not half an hour had elapsed since they had parted, but their meeting was the same as though they had not seen each other for years.

There was method in their little farce, however. It sometimes won for them a gratis drink from some sympathizing stranger.

When they had embraced, the two bummers held each other off at arm's length and looked at each other.

"Th' same old Dob!" exclaimed one.

"Th' same old Job!" echoed the other.

"Dob," said Job, "I would ask ye to drink, but th' fact is I'm busted."

"My case exactly," said Dob, sorrowfully. "I would ask ye ter take somethin' with me, Job, but I haven't th' wherewith."

Both groaned aloud.

"This is too awful bad fer anything, this is," complained Job. "Ter think that we meet at last, and that I haven't th' means ter greet ye as one gentleman should greet another."

"Don't mention it, Job," the other bummer begged; "I feel so bad about it that I am on th' point of sloppin' over."

Their faces were certainly mournful and their manner sorrowful.

"Let's brace th' bartender, Dob," Job suggested.

"I'm with ye, Job," Dob seconded.

All this was said loud enough for all around them to hear.

The frequenters of the place knew them well, and paid little attention to them, but those who had never seen them before could not help being attracted more or less.

They linked arms and went forward to the bar.

"Mister," said Job, "here is a old friend o' mine that I have jest met, and I haven't th' means ter do th' honorable by him. Now if you would only be so kind as ter chalk up two against me for th' present—"

"Get out!" exclaimed the bartender; "this saloon ain't run on charity principles."

"Dob," said Job, "we're left."

"Job," agreed Dob, "we be."

"Let's go out and weep," Job suggested.

"That's what we'll have ter do."

"Hold on," broke in a bystander, "I'll put up th' necessary for you to celebrate your meeting, one round anyhow."

The speaker was a young man, one who had never seen the bummers before, and who had been indulging a little too much to be exactly hard in the head.

The two miserable beings turned upon him with beaming faces.

"Do ye mean it?" they cried.

"Yes," the young man assured, "I mean it," and as proof that he did he tossed a quarter to the barkeeper, telling him to let them have what they wanted.

Both bummers made a rush to grasp their generous benefactor's hand.

"May your flocks increase!" cried Job.

"May your shadder never grow less!" wished Dob.

"May your children rise up an' call ye blessed!" piped Job.

"May ye laugh forever," completed Dob.

When they had thus voiced their blessings, they turned and presented themselves at the bar to get their own. That it is more blessed to give than to receive was a dead letter with them. It had no place in their creed.

As the saloon was making by the transaction, the barkeeper did not take the trouble to tell the young man that he was being imposed upon.

He looked upon it as "none of his funeral" anyhow.

The two "hard cases" took a ten-cent drink each, and a cigar which they said they could share in the smoking, and once more thanking their deluded good Samaritan, went forth to try the same experiment elsewhere.

But luck was against them for the rest of the night, and that proved to be their first and last treat.

When, at a late hour, they found themselves out upon the street, tired, sleepy, hungry and thirsty—more thirsty than anything, they were disconsolate enough.

"Dob," said Job, "I am afeerd Fortune is sailin' t'other way."

"Job," returned Dob, "I am afeerd that sick is th' case."

"We're hard up," voiced Job.

"I allow we be," agreed Dob.

"And what be we goin' ter do about it?"

"I'm thinkin' that we'll have ter roost out ter-night."

"It looks that way, fer a fact. I wonder where that dootyful son o' mine is about now?"

"I'll give that up without tryin'," said Dob at once.

He served us a dirty trick, Dob."

"That's what he done, Job."

"And worst of all, I reckon he's got them papers and pictur' that I've lost. I don't know where they be if he ain't."

"No doubt he's got 'em safe enough."

"An' that bein' th' case, Dob, how be I ter git holt of 'em again?"

"I opine that you'll have ter find th' youngster first, Job."

"Mebbe you're right. It was a dirty trick, wasn't it, when we was gettin' on so fine! We had a picnic there."

"That's what we had. Yes, it was a scurvy bit o' work, jest as you say; an' it is too bad that we didn't git th' other fiver out o' him afore he sloped."

"Right you are; but there's no use cryin' over milk that's got away, as I've hearn tell. so don't let's grieve about it. We made th' fur fly while th' other fiver held out."

"You bet your life we did. Why, we owned th' hull town fer th' time bein'."

"That's what we did. But we don't own much of it ter-night. I'd like ter meet ther kid, an' you bet we'd make him shell out. We'll keep our eyes open, an' th' chances is we'll light on ter him afore long. He'll git a job, mebbe, an' then we'll work him."

"You're talkin', we will."

"I wouldn't mind th' loss so much—I'm speakin' of th' pictur' and papers, Dob—I wouldn't mind it so much if I only had another pictur'."

That is all I had ter prove that I am a gentleman. With that pictur' in my pocket, I felt at home in th' best society."

"I feel fer ye, Job, an' you have my sympathy. Th' question now, though, is, what about a place ter sleep ter-night?"

"Oh, we'll find a place, no doubt. If we don't, then we'll let th' place find us."

"There's logic in them words, Job."

"An' it won't be th' fu'st time, either. But, Dob, I'm a-thinkin'."

"Be ye, Job, fer a fack?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, what ye thinkin'?"

"I'm wonderin' if we couldn't play th' game with that woman jest as good as Max done it, an' have th' hull boodle to ourselves."

"Job, shake."

They shook.

"Job, you're a thinker o' th' times," Dob complimented.

"Thank ye, Dob; but what is your opine?"

"I opine that if you kin make it work, Job, that I'll drink ter yer health till th' cows come."

"You're a gentleman, every inch. But do you think we kin make it work?"

"Do you know where she lives?"

"Yes, I know that much, ter begin with."

"That is one p'int, then. Th' next one is, does she know you?"

"No; and that is jest where th' loss of th' pictur' comes in bad. I don't see how I kin prove that I am a gentleman, so's ter make her understand it."

"It won't be easy, Job, I'm afeerd. There's nothin' like tryin', though, an' luck may turn in our favor."

"An' it may turn plump against us. S'pose we git gobbled by th' perlice. I don't relish th' idee o' that."

"Worse things might happen than that. Winter is comin' on some o' these days, Job, an' in case we should conclude ter winter on th' Island, we would be sure o' our feed."

"There's hoss sense in that, Dob, sure. If I'll go up ter that house an' see how th' land lays, ter-morrow, will you go with me?"

"I will, Job, if I'm sober, an' th' indications is that I will be."

"An' will ye stand by me and back me up in what I say?"

"That's what I will."

"An' swear ter anything that I want ter prove by ye?"

"Ditter; which means jest so."

"Then it is all settled, an' we'll go."

"An' it would be a good thing, Job, if we could block that youngster off so's he couldn't draw no more, wouldn't it?"

"It would sarve him right fer th' way he has treated us, Dob, and that's what it would."

"Can't it be worked?"

"Mebby it kin. We'll think over that p'int. But, say, what about that place ter sleep? We don't seem ter be findin' it purty fast, nor is it findin' us."

"Say, th' play is about out; s'pose we try th' beg dodge an' see if we can't git enough ter pay lodgin'."

"Come right erlong."

They linked arms and went off, and in a little time came to a street where a crowd of people was pouring out of a theater.

There they separated, one taking one side and the other taking the other, and each set up his own particular tale of woes.

After the crowd had passed they joined each other again to compare notes.

"What luck, Dob?" asked Job.

"Forty cents," was the reply; "what luck you, Job?"

"A quarter."

"Ah-ha! we're in clover. Here's a place open right over here, Job. Come on, and we'll take a night-cap."

"That's what we will, Dob."

They crossed the street and entered a saloon, and in a short time their money was gone. That mattered little, however, for now they felt able to sleep anywhere.

CHAPTER XXV.

MAX BARROWS HEARS SOMETHING.

MAX BARROWS had been fortunate.

Already he had found a situation. Not that it was anything to boast of, but it was far better than none.

His first move had been to find a cheap but respectable boarding-house, and that done, he had next fitted himself out with some clothes, so that when he appeared upon the street next day he was passably respectable in appearance.

Taking an early start, he had set out to find something to do, avoiding that part of the city where he thought he would be likely to meet his parent or Dob Ritters.

He had not gone far when a sign in the window of a real estate and insurance office caught his eye. It gave him the information that a clerk was wanted.

Without a moment's delay he entered.

"I see by your sign in the window that you want a clerk here," he said.

"Ha!" exclaimed the proprietor of the office, "my bait has caught a bite in a very short time. That sign has not been there five minutes."

"So much the better for me, then, perhaps," responded Max.

A talk followed, ending in Max's taking the situation at a salary of seven dollars a week,

with the prospect of a raise if he gave satisfaction.

He hung up his hat and set to work immediately.

Trying to give satisfaction, he was pleased at night to hear his employer say that he had succeeded, and that if he continued as well as he had begun, his situation would be permanent.

Max's employer was one Swithin Brightley. He had been in the business for years, was quite well known, and was doing a thriving trade.

At first Max thought he was the only employee, but he found out that there was at least one other.

During the forenoon of his second day there, while Brightley happened to be out, Max was surprised to have a large man with a dark and scowling face and a big, bristling, black mustache, come into the office and make himself quite at home.

He came right in behind the office railing, took off his hat and laid it down, glanced at Max, sat down in Brightley's chair and took up the newspaper.

Max felt that it was his business to know who he was.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but in the absence of Mr. Brightley I feel it my duty to ask who you are."

The big man turned his snake-like eyes upon Max, causing the youth almost to shiver, and after looking at him for some seconds, responded:

"That's all right, young feller. I am in Mr. Brightley's employ, the same as I suppose you are, seeing that you are here. My name is Rahab Clinkerly, and I'm Mr. Brightley's collector and outside agent."

"That's all right, if it's straight," said Max.

"Mr. Brightley has never mentioned your name to me, though, so I thought I'd like to know what right you have here in his absence."

"No harm done. I suppose he'll be in soon, won't he? and then he will set your mind easy. By the way, what is your name?"

Here was a point where Max had to be all the time on his guard. He had given an assumed name, in order to lessen the chances of his father's finding him.

"My name is John Hoil," he answered.

Clinkerly smiled.

"Are you any relation to the 'Pocket Hoyle'?" he asked.

"I guess not," Max returned; "I'm no authority on games."

They talked on for a time, Max keeping one eye upon the man and the other on his work, and finally Brightley came in.

He greeted Clinkerly, and Max knew then that it was all right.

"Your new clerk here was going to fire me out, I guess," Clinkerly said, with a laugh.

"I forgot to tell you, Hoil," said Mr. Brightley, "that Mr. Clinkerly is in my employ. He will have full charge of the office whenever I am absent."

That settled it, and Max turned to his work.

The two men fell into a conversation, and although they talked in low tones, Max, whose ears were keen, caught all they said.

"Well, what success?" he heard Brightley ask.

"First-class," Clinkerly returned. "The man is bagged, and Black Jack has him in charge."

"Don't speak so loud," Brightley cautioned, "that fellow may hear."

"Oh, he can't catch a word from here," Clinkerly assured, "and if he does he won't know what we are talking about."

"Well, how did you work the game?" Brightley inquired.

"In first-class style," was the assurance. "It could not have been done better. Pilate did his part first-rate, and it went off like a charm."

Max wondered what they could be talking about, but he did not let on that he was listening. He bent low over his book and worked away with a will.

"Well, give me the particulars of it," Brightley directed.

"It is soon done. You see Daniels had been on the track of a fellow by name of Max Barrows—"

The speaker was suddenly interrupted by a great noise in the direction of the new clerk, and he and Brightley looking up, they saw Hoil sprawling on the floor, his high stool on top of him.

Max had had the stool tilted, and at the mention of the name Daniels he tilted it still further, to bend lower over his work and strain his ears the more. He had rightly guessed that it was the great Duke Daniels that was meant, but he had no idea that he should hear his own name mentioned in connection. When he did, he gave such a start that the stool toppled over and away he went.

"Hello! what is the matter with you?" Brightley demanded.

"I—I—I fell over," Max stammered, as he scrambled up.

His face was very red, and he was greatly confused, but nothing was thought of this, as his fall was enough to account for it.

"Yes, I see you did," said Brightley. "Can't you sit up? How did you come to fall? Do you have fits, young man?"

"N—no, sir," Max answered; "I just slipped, that was all. I—I had the stool tipped so, and a— a spider made me start, and over I went."

"Well, get up and try it over again, and perhaps you will break your neck the next time."

"I won't let it happen again, sir," said Max, humbly.

He got back to his place, gave his attention to his work, and the two men resumed their interrupted talk.

Needless to say that Max was bent upon listening now, if he had not been before hearing his own name.

"What were you about to say?" asked Brightley.

"I will start over again," responded Clinkerly, in a tone slightly lower than before. "Duke Daniels had been on the track of a fellow named Max Barrows. I don't know exactly what he was after him for, but that does not matter. Pilate followed him to the place where young Barrows was boarding, and there overheard enough to give him the whip-hand in our game. When you said bag the man, Pilate had the scheme right at his fingers' ends. His first idea was to go to Daniels, tell him that young Barrows had sent for him, and thus decoy him into a trap. But it worked better than that. Daniels wanted to see Barrows again, and went to the same place. Pilate followed. The detective found that Barrows was gone, and as he was going away Pilate stepped up and told him a good story about his knowing where the young man was, and so forth, and set out to take the detective there. From that point it worked just as it had been planned beforehand."

"And you had no trouble, eh?"

"Not a bit. A piece of lead pipe laid him out, and then all we had to do was to bundle him up and take him off to his present quarters."

"And how does he take it?"

"Jack reports that he is as unconcerned about it as can be. He don't seem to be making any fuss at all. Is taking everything easy."

"He must be looked out for. He is a deep one, and he may be out of there before you would be aware of it."

"He may be smart, and all that sort of thing, but I don't see how he is going to get out of there. Jack is to be trusted, and there is no other way than by a bribe that I can see."

"All the same we must keep our eyes upon Jack. There is no knowing what Daniels is up to."

"I tell you there is no need to fear Jack. Now, what next on the programme? Any more work to be done?"

"Yes, there is a good deal more on the programme. And, Clinkerly, I tell you we have got to be careful. This case is assuming big proportions. It is as dangerous as walking over a big powder magazine. It may explode under us at any moment."

"I am as well aware of that as you are. You need not fear that I shall take any big risks."

"I know that, but there is no knowing what may turn up to knock us out. It is a big thing for our pockets, but the risk is worth all that we get out of it. I am at times sorry that I ever took hold of it at all."

"You don't want to weaken that way. Keep a stiff upper lip, and we will come out all right. It will soon be over anyhow, won't it?"

"Yes, if it works well he will have the woman and her child on the way to England by that time."

"And then Daniels is to be set free."

"Yes. And, in doing so, every care must be taken so that he will have no clew as to where he has been, or who trapped him."

"Exactly. There is one thing strange about this matter, however."

"What is that?"

"You know I said that Daniels was after one Max Barrows. Well, that fellow is in some way interested in Mrs. Russelford, and has been drawing money from her pocket through some means or other."

"Well, that cannot possibly concern our case. We will take care of what we have been engaged to do, and nothing further. If there is anything more to handle, our employer will have to look after it himself. Our work ends with this part of it."

"What has to be done now? You said there is more work laid out."

"That other fellow is stirring himself too much in the case, and has got to be retired about as Daniels has been."

"You mean young Kempton?"

"Yes."

"All right, we will attend to his case. What about the police, though?"

"Oh, we can't interfere with their work. They are on the wrong track, however, and are not likely to cross our path. If they do, we shall have to drop and lie low for a time, for we can't hope to buck against the police force."

At that point some customers entered the office, the conversation was broken off, and Max heard no more of it. What he had heard, however, gave him plenty of food for thought for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REPORTER TRICKED.

WHEN the papers came out on the morning following the visit of Roger Kempton to Mrs. Bellows, his article was the best one on the Russellford mystery.

It brought him considerable praise from the editor, and he felt amply repaid for the little trouble his information had cost him.

He had set forth points that no other reporter had been able to get hold of, and had advanced ideas that were new.

That evening he called again at the home of Mrs. Bellows, but this time it was more to see Miss Powers.

"Hello!" that young lady playfully exclaimed, as she entered the room.

"Still at the telephone, are you?" Roger laughed.

"Oh, yes, that is the handiest word I can find now," Haidee confessed.

"I was tempted to call for you again to-day to take dinner with me," the reporter declared, "but I was afraid that you might seriously object."

"Indeed I would have done so," Haidee answered. "I have been teased constantly since I dined with you yesterday. You need not look forward to being troubled with me any more in that way."

"Troubled with you?" Kempton exclaimed; "does it look as though it was trouble, seeing that I was eager to have you again so soon? Still, little tyrant, I suppose it must be as you say."

"Indeed it must," Haidee declared.

This was all said in a playful way, but Kempton could see that there was seriousness at the bottom of it.

Mrs. Bellows and the rest of the family came into the room, and a pleasant hour was passed, but after a time they all went out, leaving Roger and Haidee to have the room to themselves.

"Haidee," Kempton presently said, "you have taken away a pleasure that I had hoped I might enjoy occasionally."

"Have I?" innocently.

"Yes, you have."

"And what is that, pray?"

"I had hopes, seriously, that we might dine together occasionally, as we did yesterday. Are you in earnest in saying that it must not be?"

Haidee, with her womanly insight, saw that the conversation was turning into a channel that might carry it to an important issue. She had no thought of turning it aside from that channel, however.

We have hinted that the happy pair were lovers, and such they were, though neither had made that confession to the other.

Haidee, if she knew her heart at all, knew that it had gone out to the handsome young reporter; and he, on his part, knew well that he loved her.

From his quoted words at the end of a preceding chapter, however, we have seen that there was an obstacle, on his part, to their union. It was, to use his own words again, owing to the fact that he had no name to give her. He did not know who he was.

"I was in earnest in what I said," Haidee assured, in answer to his question. "It has brought about much unpleasant comment at the office."

"I am sorry for that," said Kempton, honestly. "Still," he added, "I am none the less sorry to lose the enjoyment."

"You are not speaking seriously," said Haidee, doubtfully.

"I was never more serious," Roger assured. "Do you know that our little half-hour together yesterday was one of the happiest I ever experienced?"

"How should I know it?" playfully, but in serious tone.

"I can see that you are determined not to know until I tell you," responded Kempton. "Haidee," he declared, desperately, "do you not know that I love you? and that every moment in your company is a pleasure to me? If you do not know, if you will not know, then I tell you that such are the facts. Haidee, I love you."

The pretty girl turned her eyes to the floor, saying:

"Of course I supposed you liked me, Roger."

"Yes, so I did, but that liking has grown into a stronger affection. Now I would ask you if you care anything for me, Haidee."

"Of course I care for you, Roger; I like you very much indeed."

"Then, Haidee, I must tell you that it is time that our love and liking should cease—No, that is not what I mean, for my love for you will never cease. What I would say is this: I must lay my heart at your feet, tell you my miserable story, and have an understanding now—to-night. I love you, and I would make you my wife, but there is a barrier in the way."

"A barrier!" and Haidee looked up with quick surprise.

"Yes, Haidee, a barrier."

"And what is it?"

"I will tell you my story, which you have never heard, and then you will understand my

meaning fully. You know me as Roger 'Kempton, but that is not my rightful name. Whether I have any name at all, that is mine rightfully, I do not know. My very earliest recollection is of living in the family of Doctor Kempton, in this city. For years I thought myself his son. At last I found that I was not, and asked him who I really was. He put me off, then, telling me that it was not important, since I was to be known as his son, but that he would tell me all about my parentage some time. That some time never came. The doctor was suddenly killed, and the secret went out of the world with him. You know me as Roger Kempton, but who am I?"

"What need you care?" Haidee asked, her hand stealing its way into his.

"But I do care, Haidee, and that is the barrier I speak of. How could I ask you to marry me, with no name to give you?"

It was out, the truth set forth. The young man sat with head bowed, and his whole demeanor was sorrowful enough. Both of the girl's hands found their way into his during the next few moments.

"You have more than once remarked that our thoughts and opinions are very similar," Haidee quietly observed.

"Yes, I have frequently noticed that; but what do you mean?"

"Suppose our positions were reversed, Roger?" It was said quietly, calmly, but it caused Roger Kempton to look up quickly, and as he looked into Haidee's face her deep eyes told him the truth.

"Dare I hope that I understand you?" he questioned. "Haidee, do you love me? Haidee, will you marry me, knowing the truth as you do?"

"I do love you, Roger," was the fond assurance, "and I will marry you. Do you not know that I have loved you all along?"

The hour that followed was a happy one indeed, and when at length Roger Kempton took his leave, he felt that a new world had opened its portals to receive him.

Having some items for his paper, he went to the office and turned them over to the editor, and then set out for home.

When he reached there, and was about to enter the house, a voice just behind him called, in a low tone:

"Mr. Kempton, is that you?"

"Yes, it is I," Kempton answered.

"I would have a word with you, please."

"Who are you, sir?"

"I come from Mr. Daniels."

"Oh; all right."

Kempton was at the top of the steps, and the man who had called to him was at the bottom.

The reporter ran down the steps again, to learn what the man had to say. He found him a young man, or not over thirty anyhow, and though neither well-dressed nor inviting in appearance, not what could be called a rough-looking character.

"You say you are from Duke Daniels?" Kempton questioned.

"Yes," was the assurance, "an' he wants ter see you. He wants ye ter come to his office at once. Says it's important, and that it will give you a big snap for your paper."

"Good!" exclaimed Kempton; "I'll go at once."

The fellow went away, and the young reporter set out in the opposite direction at a lively gait.

Kempton had no suspicion of anything wrong. It was impossible that he could have. The story the man had told was such as to disarm every thought of foul play, had any existed.

The hour was not early, but by taking the Elevated the young reporter soon found himself in the neighborhood of the detective's office, and made all haste to get to his destination.

When he came in sight of the building, he saw a bright light in what he took to be Duke Daniels's room. It was as he had expected to find it.

Entering the building with haste, he started to run up the stairs, but he had taken no more than three steps when hands were laid upon him from behind and he was jerked backward to the floor.

He struggled desperately to free himself, but he was soon overpowered.

A hand had been clapped over his mouth instantly, so that outcry was impossible.

"Keep still," a voice hissed, "or it will be th' worse fer ye!"

Kempton recognized it as the voice of the man who had lured him into the trap, for a trap he could not help knowing, now, that it was.

Chloroform was quickly applied, and in a few moments the victim was insensible.

There were two of the rascals, and they were the same ones who had trapped Duke Daniels.

"Well done again!" Dunkers exclaimed in an undertone.

"Yes," agreed Clinkerly, "so far it is well done, but it is not all done. I wish it was. Look out and see if the coast is all clear, and get the carriage up here so we can get him into it."

"You don't expect th' street to be clear, here, at this hour, do you?" Pilate asked in a tone of surprise.

"I mean of any one who will know us. Come, move yourself."

Dunkers stepped out, looked around at the persons passing, and seeing no one he knew, motioned to the driver of a carriage that was a little distance off, and the carriage was driven up.

Dunkers returned, then, to the hallway of the building.

"No one there?" asked Clinkerly.

"No, no one we need care fer."

"And no policeman?"

"Nary a one."

"All right, then, lay hold here, and we'll have it over with."

They lifted their victim up and carried him out, and as they came out into the light it was seen that Clinkerly had on a policeman's uniform. It was that that made their daring deed safe, and in a little time Roger Kempton was in a position similar to that of Duke Daniels.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW DANIELS'S SCHEME WORKED.

WHEN Black Jack paid his next visit to his prisoner, on the morning of the second day of the detective's incarceration, he found him lying on his bed of straw and groaning in agony.

"What is the matter?" the darky asked, in great alarm.

"Oh, I am dying," the detective groaned.

"Dyin'!"

"Yes, dying. Oh, such pain as I am in."

"What is th' matter with ye? What can I do for ye?"

The darky was thoroughly frightened.

"You can't do anything for me, only let me die," the detective answered.

"Sha'n't I go for de boss, an' have a doctah procured?"

"No, no, it won't do any good. This is an old complaint, and I expected it would finish me sooner or later."

"Bat, kain't anything be done, boss? Land o' goodness! you mustn't die for de want ob a doctah. I'll go for de boss on de double hump, an' hab him heah in jest no time."

"No, no," protested the detective in apparently weak tones, "it won't do any good. Doctors don't understand my case at all. There isn't but one thing that can help me, and as I can't get that it is all up."

"What am dat one thing, boss?" the darky asked. "Jest tell me what hit am, and by de great horn spoon you shall hab it."

"You would have to go to a druggist's to get it."

"I'll go ter fo'ty-seben druggists, if hit am necessary," the black declared. "Lawd! you mustn't die on my hands, an' dat am a sack. My orders is ter see dat you don't want fer nothin', an' whatever you say git, I'll done got hit mighty quick."

"You will have to go in a hurry, for it will take the druggist some time to put it up, perhaps."

All the time the detective was rolling and groaning desperately.

"I'll run, boss, shua."

"And will you go?"

"Yes, yes; only tell me what ter go fer, an' I'm off a'ready."

"Well, pay attention, then, for if you make any mistake it will kill me anyhow. Tell the druggist to put up one drachm of pharmacopoeia, one grain of hydrochloric bacilli, one grain of saccharated infusoria, one ounce of aqua amyl sulphuretted hydrogen, and two ounces of anhydrous chlo ine acid of—"

"Hol' on, fur de lub ob goodness, hol' on!"

At the first word the darky's eyes had opened wide, and as the detective proceeded, rattling off such words as came first to his mind, they opened wider and wider until there was danger that they would start from their sockets.

"What's the matter?" Daniels asked.

"What am de matter? Why, what do you s'pek I is? I couldn't recommember de fu'st word you done said, let alone all de rest."

The detective fell back with a groan that was startling.

"Then there is no help for me," he moaned.

"If I cannot get that mixture, just as I told you, I shall be dead within an hour."

"No, no! I'll run fur de boss," cried the frightened darky. "Mebby he kin ketch on ter what you said."

"No, no, Jack, it wouldn't be of any use," still protested the detective. "He would not remember it any better than you would. The words are hard ones, and no mistake. Just go out, Jack, and let me die in peace. You have been good to me, Jack, and I thank you for it. Good-by."

With that Daniels turned his face to the wall, uttering another hair-raising moan.

The darky was really distressed.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, "somethin' has got ter be done, boss. Sha'n't I go an' bring de boss, an' tell him ter fetch a doctah? De doctah could git on ter dem jaw-crackin' words, an'—"

"No, no, I would be dead by that time, Jack. If I only had paper and pencil I might write it but for you, but—"

"Ha!" the black exclaimed, "dat am jest de

thing! I will git paper an' pencil in jest a jiffy, an' you kin write it out. We'll git dar yit, boss."

Away he went on a run, leaving the detective smiling over the result of the scheme so far.

The darky was soon back, and the detective took the paper and pencil and proceeded to write, apparently with the greatest difficulty, the message he desired to send out.

"There," he said, when he had done, "take it to the nearest drug store you can find, Jack, and hurry back with what is given you."

"I'll go double-quick."

"Yes, do so. It may be in time to save me."

The darky hastened out, closing and locking the door after him, and the detective heard his steps ascending the stairs in haste.

What Daniels had written was this:

"DARKY:

"SIR:—This communication is highly important, and I judge you will give it immediate attention. I, the writer, am Detective Duke Daniels. I am in trouble, and trust to you to help me out. The bearer cannot read. Detain him while you put up some harmless mixture for him to bring to me, as he thinks I am dying; and while doing so, get some one to follow him to the place where I am, as I do not know the place I am in. That person can report to you, and then please send word to my office, putting the whole matter into the hands of my men. Do not fail me, as this may prove my last and only chance. Truly yours,

"D. D."

Could that letter have reached a proper destination, it might have proved the means of the detective's escape, but it was destined to meet another fate.

The darky was thoroughly in earnest, without a ray of suspicion that a trick was being played upon him, and he prepared in all haste to leave the house. He threw aside his belt and revolver, which, by the way, he put on only when visiting his prisoner; donned his hat and coat, and made for the door.

Just as he opened the door, however, he came face to face with Rahab Clinkerly.

"Hello," Clinkerly exclaimed, "where are you going in such haste?"

"Golly, but I is pow'ful glad you's here, boss," the darky exclaimed in turn and honestly enough; "de man be dyin', shua."

"What? What man's dyin'?"

"Why, de fu'st prisoner. He done be pow'ful sick, an' I's jest goin' fer a dose fer him."

"What has he sent you for, you black rascal?"

"Golly, I'll neber tell ye, boss. I couldn't say dem words ef I war hung for't. He's writ it out, an' says he must hab it double quick, or he's a goner."

"What! Do you mean to tell me that you are taking out a written note from him? You infernal black idiot! Don't you know that he is playing you for the fool that you are? I thought you had some sense in your thick head. Show me that note, and mighty quick, too."

The face of the darky took on a sickly hue, and he produced the note and handed it over. Still, though, he protested that it was all right. He had not had a thought of suspicion before.

"Oh, hit am all right, boss," he muttered, "for I know he am sick ernough. He couldn't fool dis chile if he wasn't, you kin bet on that."

Clinkerly paid no attention to him, but was reading the note with clouding face and staring eyes.

"Shut the door, you more than fool!" he roared, when he had ended reading it. "If I hadn't met you just as I did, that man would have been out of here in less than an hour. He is no more sick than I am."

"W-w-what!" the darky cried.

"Just what I tell you, that's what. He has played a nice trick on you, and if you had gone to a drug store with this note he would have got away in no time. He has sent for help, instead of for medicine, and you would have been watched."

"Hit am onpossible!" the black gasped.

"No, it isn't, either. Here, I'll read it to you, and he did so.

"Great Ab'm Linkum!" Black Jack exclaimed, "who'd 'a' thunk hit. Why, if he ain't sick, then I neber seen anybody what was, dat am all. An' sich a friendly and quiet feller, too, an' seemed ter think so much o' me, I didn't think he'd play me mean fer de world."

"And what did I tell you? Didn't I tell you not to make friends with him, but to have little to say to him? It's a wonder that you didn't let him have your revolver to play with."

"Oh, I wouldn't done nothin' like dat, boss."

"You might just as well, as to carry notes for him. I did not think to warn you on that point, for I thought you had sense enough to know better. Now if he should get sick in earnest, you want to send for me, and do nothing else. If he dies, let him; he can't die but once. Come, and we'll go down and see him. I'll tell him that his game didn't work. Great Scott! but it was lucky that I happened here when I did."

The darky led the way to the cellar, very much downcast in spirit, and Clinkerly put on a mask as he followed.

In the mean time the detective was aware that something had miscarried. He had heard the loud talking, and rightly guessed the truth even before he was certain.

Now his chances for escape would be greatly lessened. Perhaps there would not be another. He groaned as he thought of it.

Soon he heard steps coming down the cellar stairs, and not being sure that his guess was right, he commenced to groan again.

"Oh, you kin shet up yo' moanin' an' yo' groanin' now," cried Jack, as he opened the door of the cell. "You don't fool dis chile any mo'. I didn't think hit of ye, 'deed I didn't. Hit was er mean trick, after th' way I's been treatin' you, an' you orter be 'shamed ob it."

"Your little game didn't work," said Clinkerly, as he stepped in. "You can't get out of here that way, my pretty detective. You had better take things easy, and when th' time comes you will be let out all safe and sound."

"Well, I see it failed, and that's the end of it," observed the detective, as he got upon his feet. "Jack, I'm much obliged to you all the same, for you meant well enough, I am sure."

He wanted to find how it had come about.

"He won't mean well enough any more, however," declared Clinkerly. "Anything else of the sort will come right to me, so you have fair warning. Only that I happened here, your game might have worked."

"No fear of my trying the same thing again," said the detective. "Next time it will be something else. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, you know."

As he said that the detective gave a sudden spring forward, caught hold of the mask and tore it from Clinkerly's face.

The action was so sudden and unlooked-for that Clinkerly had no time to step back out of reach, and Duke Daniels had a good look at him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DANIELS IN DANGER

CLINKERLY sprang back with an oath.

"What did you do that for?" he demanded.

"To see your face, Rahab Clinkerly," was the detective's cool response.

"You know me!"

The man's scowling face turned pale as he uttered the exclamation.

"I do, as it happens," was the answer.

There was a pause. Clinkerly saw that the detective was now in possession of dangerous information.

"Well, little good it will do you," he finally said, "for you will not get another chance to get out of here. When you do get out, I shall be where you will not find me in a hurry."

"I am not out yet," observed Daniels, "so I will make no boasts of what I will do. There is many a slip—and so forth, as you know."

"And as you have experienced. Yes, I am aware of it. You slipped up badly in trying to get away from us. See that you don't try it again."

"Don't give me the chance."

"No fear of that."

Clinkerly had backed out of the cell, and now ordered the darky to close and lock the door.

That was done, and the pair went up to the floor above.

"You ought to be killed for this!" Clinkerly exclaimed angrily, turning upon the darky.

"I's pow'ful sorry, I 'clar ter goodness," Jack said, "but I thought fo' shua he done be dyin'. He won't fool me no more, nohow."

"It will be death to you, if he does, that is all," warned Clinkerly. "You have had a taste of him now, and know what to look out for. He is not your friend, and you don't want to believe a word he says. As sure as he gets out of here, just so sure you will go to prison. Mind what I tell you."

"Oh, you kin trust dis chile now, boss. Fooled once is ernough fo' me. Don't hab no mo' fears 'bout him gittin' 'way."

"I shall have, though. I thought you had good sound sense, but I am afraid you haven't. I told you not to let him have any chance to get word to anybody, but you fell right into his snare the first time he set it."

"Hit won't happen ag'in."

"See that it don't. It is not likely that he will try anything more of the same sort, but you want to look out for something new. Don't let him get the best of you in any way. If anything turns up that you have any doubt about, just come to me before you act upon it."

"All right, I'll do that. You kin bet I'll be wise dis time."

"What is more, don't go to his cell any more without your revolver, as you have this time, and if he makes any attempt to get out, just bore him."

"I'll do hit, shua."

"See that you do; and now, how about the other prisoner—how is he this morning?"

"Golly, I ain't been ter see, yet. I went ter see this one, fu'st, an' he was so sick—that is, he made out he was—that hit knocked everything else out o' my head."

"Well, go down now and see. That is what I came here for."

"All right; I'll be back in er minnit."

The darky went down to the cellar again, but this time passed through a door that opened upon the rear half of the dismal place.

The cellar was divided into two parts, a heavy wall marking the line. In one part were the

heater, coal-bins, etc.; in the other provisions were stored. There was but little of either there now, however.

In each half of the cellar were two cells, one of which the detective occupied, and in one in the rear part was Roger Kempton.

Neither prisoner was aware of the presence of the other. Daniels had not heard Kempton brought in, as the young reporter had been carried down a rear way, and it happened that the detective was asleep at the time.

When the darky reached the door of Kempton's cell, he unlocked the door and stepped within.

The cell was similar in all respects to the one the detective occupied.

Kempton had been up some time, and had been trying to make out something of the noises and voices he had heard. The latter had come to him but dimly, however, through the closed doors, and it had been impossible for him to distinguish any words.

"Good-mornin', sah," the darky greeted; "how do I find you?"

It was the first time Kempton had seen Jack.

"You find me here, as you see," was the response.

"Yas, so I do see, an' here you is likely ter stay fer a time, too. What do yo' want fer yer breakfast?"

"Anything, so long as it is good and clean."

"All right, sah. You shall hab it shortly, h."

"Hold on," cried Kempton, "I want to talk with you a minute."

Jack had already stepped out and shut the door.

"Ain't got no time ter talk, boss," was the response from the other side of the door; "ain't got nothin' ter say, anyhow."

With that he was gone, and Kempton had to swallow his disappointment at not being able to question him.

Jack went to Clinkerly to report.

"He am all right, boss," he said. "Both of 'em is safe an' sound, an' you kin jest gamble high on't that they is goin' ter stay so."

"See that they do. Mind, you are not to hold any talk with them, and you are not to do anything that they ask you to, no matter what it is, unless it is in the way of what they want to eat. Use them well, but take care they do not learn of each other's presence, and that neither of them tricks you."

"Oh, doan' yo' worry no more about dat. Hit will be a cold day when dis chile done git lef' ag'in."

"I hope it will."

Clinkerly took his leave, and Black Jack set about feeding his prisoners, a feeling of hatred now in his heart toward the detective.

Duke Daniels had met with a sad failure, and he lamented his luck. Now it was bound to be doubly hard for him to get another chance, as he knew.

More than that, perhaps he was now in worse danger, having discovered the identity of one of his enemies.

When Jack went down with his breakfast, the detective said:

"Well, Jack, it didn't work, did it?"

"Yo' bet your life hit didn't," was the response, "an' hit won't work now, nuther, an' dat am mo'."

"It would, though, had it not been for that man coming in upon you."

"Mebbe so, but if hit had you might not have got out after all. My orders is ter shoot ye stone dead, if ye so much as ter lift yer finger ter git away, an' I'll do hit, too. You sarved me pow'ful mean, you did, an' I don't stand no foolin' now, nohow. You hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you, Jack, and I suppose you mean business. You couldn't blame me for trying to get out of here, though, could you? I hold no ill-will toward you, Jack, and as a friend I will tell you that I shall try to get away from you as soon as I can. If you want to keep me here, keep your eyes open."

"You kin bet I'll do dat, now, an' when you git holt o' me nappin' ag'in, let me know."

"All right, I'll do it."

"And now, I'm goin'. I don't want ter have any talk with ye, after th' mean trick ye played me. Why, if you had got off, I'd been killed fer shua."

"So bad as that, Jack?"

"Yes, jest that."

"Well, then, Jack, I'll tell you what I'll do: When I escape I'll try to do it in some way so that no blame will fall on you. How will that do?"

The coolness of the man caused the darky to stare.

"You ain't 'scapin' yet," he returned.

"When you do, hit will be my fault fer shua."

"All right, Jack, just as you want it."

The darky went away, attended to his other prisoner, and after that both prisoners were left to their reflections.

It need not be said that they both had in mind the same thought, that of escape.

In the mean time Rahab Clinkerly had gone away from the house in no gentle frame of mind. Now that his identity was known to such a man as Duke Daniels, he felt by no means safe.

Daniels, he knew, was dangerous, imprisoned though he was; and once let him get out— But, he must not get out. Something must be done immediately to insure his staying right where he was.

The case had been carried too far, now, for any one to think of drawing out of it and getting off free. That was out of the question. It must be either victory or defeat, and that most complete. There was no half-way ground.

Clinkerly went to the office of Swithin Brightley.

Brightley was there, and Max Barrows—now "John Hoil"—was sitting up on his stool, hard at work.

"What is wrong?" Brightley asked when Clinkerly came in, seeing at a glance that something had gone amiss.

"Nothing is as wrong as it might have been," the helper growled.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'll tell you, and in as few words as I can."

Clinkerly laid the facts before his employer, Max catching the main part of what was said, and when he had done Brightley's face was pale and hard.

"This is serious," Max heard him say.

"Of course it is," agreed Clinkerly. "Now that he has seen me, it would not take him forever to run the whole lot of us to earth, once he got out. And will it ever be safe to let him out?"

As this was said both men looked toward the new clerk, as though fearful that he might hear their words.

Max was bending low over his books, however, and they could not think that he was paying any attention to them. In fact, they thought it impossible that he could overhear, anyhow.

"That is just what I am trying to think about," responded Brightley. "I am sorry I ever went into this game. It was the money that baited me on. Now that I am in, however, I do not mean that anything shall stand in the way of success, especially when defeat will mean imprisonment—perhaps."

"So say I."

"And the only plan for absolute safety that I can see, is—"

"To make Duke Daniels's disappearance a disappearance forever," Clinkerly finished, in a hoarse whisper that was louder than intended.

"Exactly," Brightley confirmed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DUBIOUS OUTLOOK.

SEVERAL days passed and the situation remained about the same.

But there were additional points to the mystery now. The disappearance of Duke Daniels and Roger Kempton was added.

Mr. Russelford had reported to both Daniels's men and the police the matter concerning the mysterious notes the detective had received from the person signing himself "I. C. Allthings," and Miss Powers had called at the detective's office and given the same information concerning the note that Roger Kempton had received.

This information connected their absence with the case immediately, but there was no clew to work upon, and no assistance could be rendered.

Mr. Russelford had also reported that he had seen his wife and child, but he could give no clew that might lead to being found.

He did not mention anything about his visit to Zara Royal.

When Mr. Russelford had reported seeing his wife and child, the police took less interest in the case immediately.

They looked upon it as a clear case of desertion.

Henry Russelford had settled into a state of melancholy and despair. He had speedily grown thin and haggard, and acknowledged that at times he hardly knew what he was doing.

It was almost the same with Mrs. Russelford; but she had her child with her, and that was a great deal, for without the little one she would certainly have lost her reason.

She was growing very bitter toward her husband. With the Jezebel who had charge over her to poison her mind constantly, how could it be otherwise? She had written to him, as has been shown, but he had not responded. Instead, according to the woman's story, he had received her note with contempt, and had called her a soft little fool.

Mrs. Arnold, her keeper, had been so kind and attentive to her that Corinne had grown to trust and like the woman. She fully believed, now, that in her she had a friend, and that all in good time the woman would help her to escape.

We know how she was being deluded, and how hopeless her hope was.

Corinne had paid no attention to the letter she had received from Anthon Marchmont, and he had written to her again. He stood ready to assist her, he declared, as soon as she would allow him to do so. He would help her to escape, he promised, and urged her to give him leave to act.

By this time she was ready to listen to almost any proposal.

The letter she had written to her husband

had, of course, never been delivered to him at all. It had, on the contrary, been carried straight to Zara Royal.

In allowing Mrs. Russelford to write the letter, the plotters had had two points to gain. One was to lead Mrs. Russelford to believe fully that her husband was false to her, and the other was to obtain a sample of her handwriting for Zara Royal.

Zara had begun a study of the hand immediately, and in a few days she could imitate it almost perfectly.

One morning a letter came to Henry Russelford, a glance at the superscription of which caused him to start.

He recognized the writing as his wife's.

Tearing open the envelope with mad haste, he drew out the missive it contained and read as follows:

"HENRY:—

"I write this to inform you that it will be utterly useless for you to look for me. You will never find me, nor shall I ever return to you. I do not love you, I never did love you; and if you knew all you would hate me forever. I have deceived you all along. My heart has been with another, and now I am, with the only one I truly love. I am not sentimental, and do not ask you to forgive me. You had better dismiss me from your mind, and, if you want to—though I shall not take the trouble, get a divorce. I will not hinder you. Wishing you happiness, I am—

"Not yours truly,

"CORINNE."

The letter fell from the man's nerveless hand, and he stood as though turned to stone.

Could it be that he had read aright? Was he awake, and in his right mind? He could hardly believe it.

But, there was the evidence. He knew the writing well, would know it among a thousand different styles; and the letter was unmistakably genuine.

His first thought was to carry it to the police, but on second thought he decided not to do so. Shame deterred him. If only Duke Daniels could be seen— But, he would perhaps keep it from even him.

Greatly distressed, he knew not what to do. Would it not be his best course, now, to give the matter up and call the police and detectives off?

But, doing that, he would be forced to give his reason, since the fate of the detective and the reporter was still unknown, and their friends would consider this a clew.

He knew not what course to take, but he decided that for the present he would say nothing about the letter to any one.

It was on that same day, too, that Corinne received a letter in the handwriting of her husband.

She recognized the hand, and was so nervous that she hesitated long before opening the envelope. She dreaded to read it, and yet every moment she delayed only increased her agitation.

Finally she broke the seal, opened the sheet and read:

"CORINNE:—

"I received your letter. It did not interest me any. I now write not in answer to that, but to tell you the plain truth. I do not love you, and you have only been in my way. I love another, and I cannot longer let you stand between me and that one. It may puzzle you to guess why I have put you away so mysteriously, and I will tell you. It is that it might appear that you have deserted me. I shall immediately procure a divorce, and in a few days I shall be free to marry again. If it will be of any satisfaction to you, let me add that you will be free too. Don't let any foolish affection for me stand in the way of your marrying again if you want to. You may keep Eulalie; I don't want her. Respectfully yours,

"H. R."

Suspicion had been hard enough to bear, but the blunt truth so plainly put was too much, and with a cry the poor woman sunk to the floor in a swoon.

When she came to, Mrs. Arnold was holding her in her arms and was bathing her face.

"Poor child," the heartless wretch muttered, "how much you have suffered! I pity you, and I hope that it will soon end."

"It is all ended now," said Corinne, faintly, when she could speak.

"What do you mean?" the woman asked.

"This letter is from my husband. Your fears are all realized. He tells me all too plainly that he does not love me, that he has put me away from him, and that I am nothing to him."

She burst into a heart-breaking fit of weeping.

"Do not weep, child," the woman advised.

"Show them that they cannot crush your proud spirit."

"It is impossible. I only wish I were dead."

"Tush, tush! Has not some one offered to help you escape? Why do you not accept? But, what does your husband say— No, pardon me, I have no right to ask. I forget my place. But, then, it is my sincere regard for you that makes me do so."

"You are my friend, and I trust you," said Corinne. "Here, take the letter and read it."

The woman took the missive and read.

"He is heartless!" she exclaimed. "He is not worthy of one thought from you, my poor dear."

Thank your lucky star that you are well rid of him, and that in a little time you will be free. You have your little girl with you, and what need you care?"

"Free?" Corinne repeated; "how am I to escape?"

"By free, I mean free from him and free to wed again," the woman explained.

"Oh, that is nothing. I would not care whether free or not, for I could never marry again."

The woman smiled.

"Yes you will," she returned. "You will not let this mar your whole life. You are young and pretty, and will love again. You will live to show them that you are not easily crushed."

Corinne shook her head sorrowfully.

"Why do you not accept the offer of help that has been made?" the woman asked again. "If you have a friend, why not make use of him?"

The prisoner made no response, but her thoughts were busy.

"I am doing all that I can," the woman went on, "but I am watched, and have to be very careful."

"Would I be allowed to see that person, if I were to tell him to come here?" Corinne asked.

"Yes, undoubtedly," the woman answered, "if he could invent some good excuse to account for his coming. Why not ask him to come? Perhaps the three of us could soon arrange some plan."

"I will think of it," said Corinne.

So, with the exception of these points, the situation remained the same, as stated.

Duke Daniels and Roger Kempton were still prisoners, neither knowing of the presence of the other.

The detective was beginning to fret and chafe greatly. He called himself a blockhead a hundred times a day, because he could not devise some means of escape.

He did not take it into consideration that he was at the same time using his patience in order to quiet the distrust of his black jailer.

Kempton was even more downcast. He had made an almost enemy of his keeper and fared none too well.

The two bummers had not yet mustered up sufficient courage to call upon Mrs. Russelford. It was the foremost thought in their minds, however.

As neither of them ever looked at a paper, and it was doubtful whether they could read anyhow, they had not learned that she had disappeared.

Max Barrows was still in the office of Swithin Brightley. He was doing his best to please, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he did.

But he was not easy in mind. He had the secret that his employer knew more about the Russelford case than any one else, perhaps, and that he knew particularly of the fate of the detective.

Max felt that he ought to put the police on Brightley's track, but he had not the moral courage to take the step. Besides, his situation was at stake. Once out, and his unpleasant figuring in the Russelford matter made known, where would he get another job?

Brightley and Clinkerly had taken no steps, as yet, toward putting the detective out of the way permanently, but their danger was ever present before them.

As for the arch plotters, they felt that their schemes were progressing finely. In a brief time their contemptible ends would be accomplished.

As the game stood now, it looked as though they would win. The other side was in a truly bad condition. With the police as good as out of the race, and with Duke Daniels a prisoner, their confidence was well founded.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM.

SUCCESS at last!

At every meal Duke Daniels had been quarreling with his jailer about the poor quality of fork he furnished.

What he wanted, he declared, was one of the old-fashioned, every-day sort of forks. The kind the darky furnished was of the well-known four-tined silver-plated pattern.

"Why can't you oblige me in this, Jack?" the detective would complain. "Why can't you bring me one of the old-fashioned steel forks? I am not used to eating with these ugly things."

"Yo' will hab ter eat with dat or eat wid none," was generally the response. "We don't hab no common trash in our house, sab."

Finally, however, the darky relented, and brought the kind of fork the detective wanted.

It had been his haunting fear that perhaps the prisoner wanted to play some trick on him, and he meant to have nothing to do with it. When he had considered it well, however, and had failed to discover any possible use to which his prisoner could put a steel fork toward effecting his escape, he relented, and said:

"I will keep this, now that I have got it," observed the detective, the first time he ate with it, "and then I will be sure of having it."

This aroused the darky's suspicions at once.

"No yo' don't!" he exclaimed. "Yo' kain't

keep no fork here, sah. You is wantin' ter play some trick on me, but you kain't come it. You jest put dat fork on de plate, sah."

As he gave the order he laid his hand on his revolver.

"Oh, well, if you think that of me," cried the detective, in pretended anger, throwing the fork and purposely striking the wall with it, "take the old thing. 'I do hope you will let me have the use of it, though, Jack," he said, more moderately.

"Yo' will git de use ob nothin', if yo' don't be more civil," the darky warned, as he picked the fork up.

He went out, and when he had reached the kitchen above he made the discovery that the fork was broken. One of the tines was missing.

"De blame fool done broke hit," he muttered. "Dat war when he flung hit an' hit de wall. Sarves him right. He won't git no more favors out o' dis chile."

His head was too thick to suspect the truth—that the detective had broken the tine out purposely.

Daniels had more than once—yes, more than a thousand times—examined well the clasp and chain which bound his leg, as well as the handcuffs that held his wrists.

He knew that the clasp on his leg could be picked open, with the proper tool, and the tine of a steel fork would be just the thing to do it. But, how to get the steel fork?

His ruse has been set forth. Breaking the tine out purposely, by catching it in the chain and bending it backward to the breaking point, he had afterward flung the fork against the wall to lead the darky to think that that had been the cause.

No sooner had the black jailer closed the door on that occasion than the detective set about trying the success of the tool thus obtained.

He made several attempts, and was on the point of thinking that it was a failure after all, when suddenly the tine struck the spring just right, and the bracelet flew open.

It was success at last, as our chapter begins.

Now it only remained to carry out the rest of the idea, and failure must not be thought of. To fail in this would prove fatal to further attempts.

A strong temptation that had been continually presenting itself whenever the darky had visited the cell, was the revolver at his belt.

Daniels had many times felt like springing upon him and snatching it out, but the fact that he was handcuffed and chained stood in the way.

The chances would be against his getting possession of the weapon anyhow, and even if he did, what use could he make of it with his leg chained to the wall?

With his leg now free, however, it had another aspect entirely.

He felt like a new man, and mapped out his plan of action with care. If it did not miscarry he would soon be free.

The next time the darky visited the cell he gave a gasp of horror and dropped a pitcher of water he was carrying.

The prisoner had hanged himself.

It was true enough. There the detective hung, a strip of something white around his neck, and the end of it fastened to the brace of one of the beams overhead. He was hanging limp and to all appearances lifeless, his toes just touching the floor.

"Good Lawd! he's done hang hisself!" the black cried; and as soon as he had in a measure recovered from the first shock, he sprung forward.

It was a fatal spring for him. It was just what Daniels had hoped for. He wanted to get him at close quarters and at a disadvantage. So he had him now.

No sooner had the darky laid hands upon him than he came suddenly to life, the strip fell from his neck, the revolver was out of the belt, the darky was pushed back into a corner, and the detective had him covered.

It was all done so quickly that the darky could not realize that it had happened at all. He was quickly brought to realize it, however.

If the detective had had the use of his hands better, he would have gone further and put the chain to the black's leg, but handcuffed he did not dare risk the attempt.

"Stand back there," he cried, "and don't you so much as dare to wink your eye, or I will let drive at you. I mean business, and you can just depend on it. We will change places for a little while."

"Y-y-yo' gib me back dat 'ere resolver," the frightened darky demanded. "Ef yo' don't I'll eberlastin'ly chaw ye all up, an' you kin' pend on dat. D'ye hear me? I'll jump on ye wif both feet and stomp de dinner clean out ob ye."

In spite of the danger, the black did start forward, but a shot from the weapon brought him to a halt. A tuft of wool had been cut from the side of his head.

The detective was an excellent shot, and had fired to do that very thing.

"Back with you!" he cried, "or the next shot will be sure death! I don't want to do it, Jack, but I will, just as sure as you are a nigger. Back, I say!"

The darky recoiled now, his hand clasped to his head and his face the color of dirty chalk.

He saw that his prisoner had got the chain off his leg, and that he was free. He saw that they had changed places indeed.

"Y-y-yo' mustn't go 'way," he gasped; "de boss will be de deff o' me, shua as yo' bo'n. Yo' jes' come back heah an' stay heah, sah, or I'll jest most eternally chaw yo' ears—"

"There, now, Jack, that will do. You just toss those keys over this way, and I will call it all right for the present."

"Not by er dern sight!" the darky cried. "What do yo' tek me for? Yo' jest—"

"Come, the keys, quick," the detective ordered, "or off goes another tuft of your wool. I mean it."

The detective had taken the precaution to look and make sure that the revolver was loaded full.

"Ef yo' wants dese yere keys," growled the darky, stubbornly, "yo' will haf ter come an' tek 'em."

"If I do, Jack, it will be from your dead body," the detective sternly warned. "I will stand no fooling with you. I don't want to harm you, as I said, but I am going out of here this time, and the best thing you can do is to obey me."

The black was half crouched in his corner, and looked as though he would risk springing upon his escaping prisoner rather than lose him.

"Will you hand the keys over?" Daniels demanded.

There was no response, but Daniels saw the fellow's muscles harden, and knew that he was on the point of dashing at him.

Quick as thought the revolver spoke again, and another tuft of wool was lifted from Jack's head, on the other side and directly opposite where the first cut had been made.

This settled it. The darky's nerves would stand no more, and, dropping on his knees, he begged for mercy.

Quick to take advantage of his fear, the detective cried:

"Take that shackle and fasten it on your leg, or I'll send the next bullet right into your eye!"

"Y-y-yes, sah," the black gasped; and in a moment he had done the thing that he was sorry for the next instant. He had chained himself to the wall.

Daniels had him now, and escape was assured.

"Jack," he said, "you are in a bad fix now, and you had better come to terms. Pass over the keys, and I will see that you don't starve. You have fed me pretty well, and I don't want to do any less by you."

The darky's face was all in a perspiration, and as he wiped it on his sleeve, he mumbled in a very disconsolate manner:

"I speck hit am all up wid me, fo' shua. Reckon I'd better do as you say, boss, an' here is yer dern ol' keys. Tek 'em."

He gave them a toss, and the detective picked them up.

"You will find that you have not lost anything by giving in, Jack," he said. "I hold the best hand, and you might as well surrender. Now I want to ask you some questions. I want you to tell me the truth, too."

"All right, boss, fiah ahead, an' I'll tell you all I know. Dat is, I will if yo' will promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Dat an' dat you will let me 'scape. De boss will kill me shua, now, an' all I asks is a chance ter git out o' his reach."

Daniels felt that the darky was honest in this, but he knew better than to give him a chance to repent of it. Once out of the house, he might do the very opposite thing.

"We will talk about that afterward," he said. "I want to know now how many persons there are in this house."

"Boss, I'll done tell ye de straight troof, an' den I knows you'll let me go. I is de only one in de house, an' dere ain't nobody else here 'cept de other prisoner. He am in de other part ob de cellar."

"The other prisoner!" the detective exclaimed; "who is the other prisoner?"

"I don't know who he is," was the answer; "he is a young feller that was brought here after you was."

"How do you go to get to him?"

"Right fru de door at de foot ob de stairs dat goes de other way," was the not very intelligent direction.

"Good enough; I'll see you later, Jack."

With that the detective stepped out, closing and locking the door after him, leaving the darky begging, swearing and threatening, all in one breath.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RATHER A CLOSE SHAVE.

It was day, but the cellar would have been in semi-darkness had not the gas been lighted.

Every time the darky had come down he had lighted the gas before opening the door of the cell, and it was this that had given the detective such a good chance to practice marksmanship at his woolly head.

After he had locked the door, Daniels looked around him.

Near the cell he had occupied was another just like it, and he stepped forward and looked into it.

There was no one there.

"This seems to be a sort of private jail," he mused, "and it has been made for the very use to which it has been put. It has not been arranged very long either, that is certain," he further thought, as he noticed that the iron doors had a new look about them, and that the walls were clean and fresh.

When he had taken in everything that was to be seen, he set about finding his way into the other half of the cellar where the darky had said was another prisoner.

It was not very convenient, having his hands bound together by the handcuffs, but they had now been in that fix for so long a time that he had grown somewhat accustomed to it.

When he came to the foot of the stairs, he found that there were two ways leading from them through two different doors.

One of these was the door that opened upon the part of the cellar that he had been confined in, and the other, he reasoned, must be the one that led to the rear half.

The wall between was thick, which accounted for the fact that the detective had not learned that he had a fellow-prisoner.

Taking the keys he had forced from the darky, he tried them until he found the one that opened the second door mentioned. All beyond was inky darkness, and it would be necessary to light the gas.

Going back into the other part he looked around, and soon found a piece of paper. That he lighted at the gas already burning, and soon the other half of the cellar was lighted up.

"Is that you, you infernal black scamp?" a voice in one of the two cells demanded.

Daniels looked about him before replying. Here were two cells, the same as in the other apartment.

"No, I'm not your infernal black scamp, sir," he answered.

"Who are you, then?" was the next demand. Daniels thought he knew the voice, but could not tell whose it was.

"Who are you?" he asked in answer.

"I'm a prisoner here against my will," was the return.

"Most prisoners are of that sort, sir," observed the detective. "I was in that fix myself a few minutes ago."

"Duke Daniels, is that you?" Kempton demanded.

He had been the first to recognize.

"That is my name," was the answer; "and now, who are you? I shall know in a few seconds, though, as soon as I can find the key to your cell."

"I am Roger Kempton."

"The deuce you are! What are you doing here?"

"I am racking my brain for some plan of escape, chiefly," was the response. "I think you have beat me at that game."

"Yes," returned the detective, as, having found the right key, he threw open the door; "so it would seem. And, since I have been so lucky myself, I will try and help you out, too."

"I'll be rather obliged to you if you will, Duke."

The detective entered, found that Kempton was fastened just as he had been, and set about picking the lock of the fetter that held his ankle. He had kept the fork-tine, intending to add it to his store of curiosities at the office, and it came in handy a second time.

In a few minutes the work was done, and Kempton walked out of his cell.

The pair shook hands, and Daniels observed:

"I hardly expected that we should ever meet under such circumstances, Roger; handcuffed and in prison."

"No, nor I," returned the reporter, laughing. "Strange things happen in this world of ours, however."

"Right you are. Now, the next step is to get off these infernal bracelets. How are we going to do it?"

"I give it up. You are an older hand than I, so I will leave that for you to solve."

"Well, it will not be an easy job, I am afraid. I guess the only thing we can do is to go out and get to my office as soon as possible. We can get them off there in no time. I do not see—Hello! what have we here?"

With that sudden interruption he took a step forward, and looked into a box that stood on the floor in one corner.

"Ha! here is just what we want," he exclaimed. "It is a box of tools, and here are files."

"Good!" cried Kempton. "Now we shall soon be out of our trouble."

They pulled the box out under the light, and Kempton selecting a good file from the three or four it contained, set to work upon the detective's bracelets.

When he had filed away for about five minutes, the detective called a halt.

"It will take us two hours to get them off at this rate," he declared. "We must find some quicker way. See if there are not a hammer and cold-chisel there, or a good punch."

"Here is a hammer," answered Kempton; "and, yes," he added, "here is a chisel, too."
 "Good. Here is a block of iron that has evidently answered the purpose of an anvil, probably when these doors were put up. I will lay my handcuffs on it, so, and you take the chisel and go for them right there at their weakest point. Take care not to make a wild hit, however."

The reporter did as directed, and three or four sharp blows broke the lock of the handcuffs, and they fell off.

"That is better!" the detective exclaimed; "and now let me do the same for you."

It took but a few moments to free Kempton, and they shook hands again.

"Where is the nig?" Kempton asked.

"Come with me and I will show you," said Daniels.

Turning out the gas there, they passed into the front half of the cellar, and the detective threw open the door of the cell that had so lately been his.

"Hello, there, you black imp!" exclaimed Kempton; "how do you like it?"

"Fo' de lub ob goodness don' leave me here," the darky begged. "I'll be skint alive shua's yo' bo'n if you do. I'll be kilt quick when de boss done find you is all gone. Let me out o' heah, and gib me a chance ter git 'way."

"You're not to be trusted," said Daniels.

"Oh, boss, I swar ter goodness dat—"

"There, don't take the trouble to swear about it, Jack," Daniels advised, "for we can't take the risk with you. You will have to stay here for a time, but we will see that you don't starve. We will also see that your boss don't hurt you any. He can't get to you, anyhow."

"No, but he kin shoot at me, though. I has been shot at all I want ter be, an' don' yo' forget hit."

"No, he sha'n't shoot at you, either," promised the detective; and amid the black's swearing and coaxing they locked the cell and went away.

They ascended to the basement floor, and seeing the kitchen open, passed into that apartment. It was the domain of their darky jailer, and evidences of occupancy were to be seen on every hand.

"We may as well explore the whole house while we are about it," the detective remarked.

"Yes," agreed the reporter, "we will make one job of it, and will know the sort of place we have been in, anyhow."

They set about it immediately.

Going up to the next floor, they found that they were in a house of no mean pretensions. It was roomy and well furnished, but evidently had not been occupied for some time.

They went on, through the various rooms, but found nothing of importance until they came to one of the bedrooms.

Here, on a table, lay a revolver.

It was slightly rusty, and was not loaded, but it was in good order otherwise.

"Pocket it, Kempton," directed the detective; "it may come in handy yet, for we are not out of the woods. I am trying to frame a plan of action for the trapping of our enemies, and shall want your help."

"And you shall have it," the young reporter promised. "I have a score to settle with them as well as you now."

Just at that moment there came a sharp ring at the bell.

"Great Scott! here is a difficulty!" exclaimed the detective.

"It is lucky we got the bracelets off," observed Kempton.

"Right you are. But, let's see who it is if we can."

"How?"

"Here, the window."

The detective advanced to one window, gently raised it a little way, and looked out.

"It is that fellow Clinkerly," he announced, "and his fellow rascal. They are the ones who trapped us, I have no doubt. Here is a prospect for a fight, Kempton, and it must end in victory for us. We must make them our prisoners."

"I'm with you in that with all my heart. We'll take them if it takes a leg. Let's go down and meet them."

"Hold on, you must load that revolver first. Here, I will spare you a load out of mine, if it will fit."

It was tried, and the cartridge was found to be of the required size.

Thus fixed in the way of arms, they descended the stairs.

The bell had been rung twice more in the mean time, and the callers were next heard at the basement door.

The detective and his backer were just going down there, with the intention of opening the door, when they heard the two men already in the house. They had let themselves in.

"The black has gone out, I suppose," Clinkerly was heard to say. "Perhaps it is all the better. We can now put the detective out of the world without a witness. Come on and we'll go right down."

A chill passed down the detective's back as he heard these words, and motioning to Kempton to follow him, he crept softly down the stairs to the floor below.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TABLES TURNING.

DUKE DANIELS fully realized that he had had a narrow escape with his life.

He had looked for danger, however. When he had unmasked Rahab Clinkerly, he knew that that rascal would stop at nothing to save himself.

Daniels had known Rahab, and had not known any good of him, either; but he had not seen him in a long time, and did not know where he was staying or what he was doing. It was evident that he was still a rascal, though.

The two villains descended into the cellar, and the detective and the reporter paused at the top of the steps.

"How shall we take them?" Kempton asked.

"We made a mistake in not taking them before they got down there," the detective answered.

"How so?" the reporter inquired.

"It will be bad for us if they can let the darky out."

"That's so; I did not think of that."

"Come on, now," Daniels whispered, and he took a step down the stairs; "we'll go down while they are talking to the black."

Kempton followed right at his heels, and they silently made their way down into the place of danger.

Black Jack had been the first to speak, when the rascals entered the cellar, as Daniels and Kempton heard.

"Who'm dat?" he demanded. "Am dat yo', yo' fellers? If hit am, yo' had better lef me out'n heah, now I done tol' yo'."

"Where are you?" demanded Clinkerly, in startled tones. "What has happened here, you black idiot?"

"Fo' de Lor!" gasped the darky in terror. "Am dat yo', boss?"

"Yes, it's me," was the sharp assurance; "where in fire and smoke are you, anyhow?"

"I's heah, in de cell, sah."

Such a string of oaths as the rascal let out then was blood-chilling.

The light had been left burning in this part of the cellar, and as the detective and his companion descended the stairs they could see all that was going on.

They saw Clinkerly spring to the door of the cell and look in.

At what he saw he raved and swore again.

"Where's that prisoner?" he demanded.

The darky was so frightened that he could hardly answer.

"H-b-h-he's gone," he gasped.

"Gone!" screamed Clinkerly; "what do you mean? How did he get away?"

"I don't know, boss; deed I don't," was the trembling answer. "I kem down heah, and I done find him bangin' up by his neck to de beam. I war skart, an' I jump in ter cut him down, an' den he jes' come ter life an' grab my revolver and shoot all de har off'n my head; he did fo' shua."

"But, how did he get the chain off his leg?" the enraged Clinkerly demanded. "This is some of your work, you black devil. You have sold us out."

"No, boss, hones' an' true an' cross m' heart ter die de nex' minnit I hasn't done dat. Hit am jes' as I tol' yo', an' I couldn't help it nohow. I is—"

"Stop your whining!" roared Clinkerly, "or I will shoot you full of holes! I want you to answer some questions. How long has he been gone?"

By this time the detective and the reporter had reached the bottom of the stairs, and moving around so that the darky could not see him through the door of the cell, Daniels crept forward toward the unsuspecting Clinkerly, motioning Kempton to follow his example and prepare for the other man.

"Dey hain't been gone no more an' fifteen minutes, shua," the darky declared.

"They!" Clinkerly thundered; "do you mean to say both of them got away?"

"Yes, dey did for shua," the darky confessed.

"De one what war in heah, he jes' go an'—"

The darky was interrupted by another storm of curses.

By this time the detective was right behind Clinkerly, and Kempton was almost up to Dunkers when the latter turned and saw him.

Dunkers uttered an exclamation of fright, and at the same instant Daniels laid his hand upon Clinkerly's shoulder with the stern order:

"Throw up your hands, or I'll bore you!"

Clinkerly was much the larger man, but the detective had a name that carried fear with it. It was one thing to have Duke Daniels at a disadvantage, but it was quite another for him to hold the better hand in the game.

The rascal's face blanched, and he recoiled.

It was a desperate situation. The rascal knew that to surrender was to lose all, and that to resist was death—that he fully believed.

He hesitated.

"Hands up!" Duke Daniels thundered.

The same order had been given by Kempton to Dunkers, and the latter had obeyed. The sight of the revolver at his head was too much for him.

There is a bravery that is born of despair. That bravery now seized Rahab Clinkerly. There was a startling vision of State's Prison before his mind's eye, and he sprung back and reached for a weapon.

"Never!" he cried.

He had his hand upon a revolver, and had it half way out of his pocket, when the detective's weapon barked.

The bullet cut its way through the flesh of the rascal's shoulder.

"Surrender!" the detective cried, "or I'll take the bone next time!"

Clinkerly had started with surprise and pain, and let go of the weapon as he recoiled against the wall, but finding that he still had the use of his arm he made another attempt to draw the revolver.

"You had better think twice about it," the detective cautioned.

His weapon was pointed straight at Clinkerly's head, and his finger pressed the trigger.

Clinkerly hesitated.

"I will kill you as I would a dog," Daniels warned. "If you value your life, you had better come to terms."

The hesitation was longer, and Clinkerly was lost. His courage oozed out before the detective's keen eyes and the threatening revolver, and he held up his hands.

"Step over here alongside of him, you other fellow," Daniels ordered, motioning to Dunkers. That rascal obeyed promptly.

"Now, Kempton," the detective directed, "you hand me your weapon and then disarm them. If either of them offers resistance he will regret it."

The young reporter did as directed, and in a brief time the two villains were helplessly in the power of their enemies.

"Ha! that is my own revolver!" the detective cried, at sight of the weapon Kempton had taken from Clinkerly. "Hand it here, Roger. There, now I feel like myself again."

The next thing to be done was to confine the prisoners in the cells, and a thought came to Daniels.

Perhaps there were handcuffs in the unoccupied cells.

He directed Kempton to look, and, sure enough, a pair was found in each one of the apartments.

Following the detective's directions, the young reporter snapped them upon the prisoners' wrists, and Clinkerly and his satellite were safe.

"It seems that you have got the best of it now, Daniels," Clinkerly observed. "I wish you would see to my arm. It is bleeding pretty bad."

"I will do that," the detective promised, and he set about it immediately.

The wound he had inflicted upon the fellow was not a bad one, but it bled a good deal. The bleeding was stopped, however, and Daniels bandaged it up.

"You would have saved yourself this," he observed, while at work, "if you had surrendered at first."

"Yes, I suppose so," was the sullen response; "but I couldn't do that. Say, now that the jig is up with me, can't I sell out to you? If you will let me go I'll put you on to the whole game."

"It can't be done," the detective declared. "I am into this thing to win, and it would be only half a victory to let you get away from me. You served me out well when you got me foul, and I must return the compliment. No, we can't come to any terms in that way."

"All right; then, go ahead and learn nothing. You won't get me to talk, and you can depend on that."

"Perhaps I shall not require you to talk. If I do—well, I have made stubborn men talk before, and perhaps I can do it again."

"You'd have a job making me talk."

The dark, scowling face looked doubly ferocious, and the black, bristling mustache stood out with seemingly increased stiffness.

"It is not necessary to talk about that now," reminded Daniels. "With your permission, to be polite—but without it, anyhow, I will take a look at what you have in your pockets."

The dark face grew darker, but as resistance would have been utterly useless, none was offered.

The detective explored the man's pockets, bringing to light various letters, papers and so forth.

One thing that he found was a stub receipt book. The receipts were printed, and bore the signature in print—"Swithin Brightley, per—"

The stubs were signed with the initials—"R. C."

"Ha! you are in the employ of Swithin Brightley, are you?" the detective exclaimed. "This is a point that I shall not forget."

"No, I am not in his employ," Clinkerly denied. "This is only an old book that I found and put in my pocket."

"Oh, is it?" and the detective glanced at some of the stubs. "It is not so very old," he added, "as some of these were signed only yesterday."

Further denial was useless, and the rascal

confessed and began to beg for a chance to turn State's evidence.

This was denied, however, and the detective did not press him for any points. He felt that he had now a start that would enable him to ferret out the whole mystery, and to right the wrong that had been done.

Clinkerly was taken to the rear part of the cellar and confined in the cell that Kempton had occupied, while Dunkers was put in the one next to that which contained the darky.

"What do you think about it now, Jack?" Daniels asked, as he and Kempton were about going up-stairs.

"I fink yo' is de bery debbil," was the plain answer.

When they had gone up to the basement, the two escaping prisoners held a consultation, at the end of which Kempton set out for the detective's office, Daniels remaining on guard at the house.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BUMMERS IN DANGER.

"If it ain't my pard Dob Ritters!"

"And my old mate, Job Barrows!"

Together they rushed, arms outstretched, and embraced each other right heartily.

It was their same old trick. The scene was in a saloon. Job already there. Enter Dob Ritters. Mutual recognition, and the friendly greeting.

It was forenoon, and not early, either, and they had not yet had their morning drinks.

They had tried their little game repeatedly, but thus far without success. It was growing wearisome to them, and they were growing desperate. They had been almost the round of their circle of saloons now, and, if they did not succeed here, they were likely to go thirsty.

"Th' same old Dob!" cried Job.

"Th' same old Job!" echoed Dob.

They held each other off at arm's length, and looked at each other's face with seeming intense interest.

"Dob," said Job, "ef I wasn't broke I'd ask ye ter take somethin'. As it is, I am unable to do it."

"My case exactly," declared Dob, mournfully. "I would invite ye right up, but I haven't th' tin."

They both groaned dismally.

"This is too, too, too bad," whispered Job. "Ter think that we meet at last, after all these years, and haven't th' wherewith ter greet each other as gentlemen are bound ter do. It is sad, sad."

"Don't speak of it, Job," the other worthy begged, "don't mention it at all. I feel so bad that I could cry right out and not half try."

They were acting their best. It was do or die, almost.

"Let's sound th' bartender, Dob," suggested Job.

"I am right with ye in that, Job," Dob agreed.

Their talk was loud enough for all to hear, and linking arms they marched boldly up to the bar.

"Mister," said Job, "if you are a man of like passions with ourselves you will take pity on us. We meet after years of wanderin' up an' down th' world, an' we haven't th' necessary ter do th' honorable. Now if you would only be so good as ter scratch th' slate fer two drinks till—"

"Get out!" was the interruption; "we don't do that kind of business here."

The two bummers looked at each other mournfully.

"Dob," said Job, "it's no go."

"Job," said Dob, "we're left."

"Let's go forth and lament," suggested Job.

"We'll have ter do it," acquiesced Dob.

They were turning away, their faces as long as fiddles, when the man at the bar called them back.

He was a big-hearted countryman, and this scene moved him to pity.

"Call for your grog," he said, "and I'll pay for it."

The faces of the miserable beings beamed like the rising sun.

"Noble sir," cried Job, as he grasped his hand and shook it with both his own, "may your harvest be bounteous!"

"May your increase be a hundred fold!" added Dob, as he rushed up and laid hold upon the stranger's other hand.

"May your acres broaden!" wished Job.

"May your cattle be fat!" blessed Dob.

"May your children rise—"

"There, there," broke in the countryman, pulling himself away from them, "I don't want ter be thanked to death; call for what ye want an' down it."

"Noble heart!" cried Dob.

"Generous soul!" echoed Job.

They turned to the bar and had their promised drinks, after which they went out of the saloon arm-in-arm, smiling and happy.

As soon as they were around the corner they fell into a conversation.

"That was good, wasn't it, Dob?" said Job.

"It was a good while a-comin', though."

"Yes, it was good," agreed Dob, "but I had

begun ter think that we would have ter go dry ter day."

"So did I; an' that brings us face ter face with th' fact that we are in a bad situation."

"There is no mistake about that."

"I might say that we are in a desperate situation," further declared Job. "I will say a critical dilemma."

"I agree with ye fully," returned Dob. "It is a mighty tryin' position not ter know where th' next drink is comin' from."

"It is indeed. Somethin' hes got ter be done, Dob."

"Job, all th' evidence goes ter show that our thoughts are one in th' matter under consideration."

"An' at last, Bob, th' time is at hand when we are forced ter act. That is ter say, we must be up an' doin', an' makin' hay while th' moon is up."

"Jest exactly so, partner. I git on to th' drift o' your meanin'. We must go an' call on that female woman."

"You have hit it right on th' head."

There was a thoughtful pause, as they stood and ran the thing over in their blunted minds.

"We agreed ter do it once afore," Job presently remarked, "an' when mornin' kem we backed out."

"That is ter say you did," put in Dob.

"Yes, an' you did, too," Job declared. "But then, we hit good luck that day, an' didn't keer anything about it. It is when we are down on our uppers that we feel th' need of it."

"An' all that pints a mortal," said Dob.

"What is it?" asked Job.

"Never ter put off till ter-morrer what kin be done right away, or words ter that effect."

"Dob, you are right. Shall we go right up there?"

"I am with ye, if ye want ter go."

"And will ye help me out with the case?"

"That's what I will."

"An' you'll back me?"

"Exactly."

"An' will ye lie, if necessary?"

"Ditter; which means jest so."

"Then come right along an' we'll go afore our nerve peters out."

They set out immediately, talking as they went along, trying to outline their plan of action.

An hour later the two miserable-looking creatures rung the bell of the Russelford residence.

A servant came to the door, and at sight of them she slammed the door shut in their faces.

They looked at each other foolishly.

"We don't git on," observed Dob.

"Not very fast, anyhow," agreed Job.

"We'll try it again."

He gave the bell a vigorous jerk.

There was no response this time, and he pulled it again, ringing several times in succession.

The servant had evidently gone and reported to her master, for suddenly, after a pause, the door was flung open and Mr. Russelford was there in person.

"What do you mean by ringing the bell of my house?" he demanded severely.

Job bowed and scraped and scraped and bowed, Dob doing the same behind him, and as they did this Job made answer.

"When a gentleman rings th' bell, sir," he said, "it is gen'ly th' case that he wants somethin'; not meanin' any offense, sir."

"Well, what do you want? That is what I asked you."

"Yes, sir, jest so, sir," said Job, now beginning to shuffle uneasily, but bracing his nerves for the encounter: "we would like ter see the lady, sir, if you—"

"What lady?" Mr. Russelford interrupted.

"Why, Mrs. Russelford, o' course," answered Job.

Henry Russelford was amazed, and looked upon the two wretches with the greatest wonderment. Who could they be? and what could they want with his wife?

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I haven't any keerd," said Job, "but my name is Barrows. You jest mention that name to th' lady, an' it will bring her here in double quick time."

Barrows! The name caused the gentleman to start. What possible dealings had his wife with such beings as these?

"What do you want to see her for?" he demanded.

"We don't tell that ter anybody, hey, Dob?"

"That's what we don't, Dob supported."

"Well, then, you can't see her, and that settles the whole matter," said Mr. Russelford.

"Oh, but we must see her," protested Job, growing a little alarmed for the success of the venture; "we must see her, sir."

"You will have to state your business to me, or not at all," declared Mr. Russelford.

He was trying to get hold of some plan whereby he might learn the secret of the Barrows mystery, whatever it was.

"Who are you?" Job asked.

Remembering what he had learned from the detective, that the main point in the secret—or rather the hold the men had upon his wife—was

that the knowledge of the matter might be kept from him, he resolved to play a part.

"I am Mr. Russelford's head servant."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" said Job. "Well, then, you go tell th' lady that onless she will see us mighty quick and pony out some rocks, we'll out to her husband somethin' that she won't want ter have him know."

"I think she will see you, gentlemen," Mr. Russelford observed to this; "you may come in and I will go and consult with her."

He held open the door and the two miserable tramps shuffled in.

"You wait right here," Mr. Russelford said, "and I will soon come back and let you know what the lady says."

Saying that, he went down to the next floor and dispatched a servant for a policeman, directing that he should be brought in quietly and told to wait until called.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BUMMERS IN LIMBO.

WHILE Mr. Russelford was gone the two bummers took a survey of their position, and tried to do a little thinking.

"Job," said Dob, "were in fer it."

"We be, fer a fact, Dob," Job whispered in response. "What d'ye think of it, anyhow?"

"I think from th' looks o' things that we'd order strike her fer a tenner at th' least, this time."

"So do I; but I kinder smell a mice."

"What's that?"

"I'll bet that that feller is her hub."

"D'ye think so?"

"That's what I do, and I'm bettin' money on it. I'll bet he tries ter git th' secret out of us."

"Well, if he is willin' ter pay, why not sell out ter him?"

"That's all very well," said Job, "but if we do that it will stop th' supply from th' woman. All she pays fer is ter keep it from him."

"That's so; but it would stop th' game of that son of yours."

"Yes, an' I'd like ter do that well enough, but it is like cuttin' off yer nose ter spite yer face. Well, we'll see how th' cat jumps, fer here he comes back."

Just then Mr. Russelford returned.

"The lady refuses to see you," he reported.

"Did you tell her who we be?" asked Job.

"Yes, and she says she don't know you. You are not Max Barrows."

Mr. Russelford remembered that Daniels had described Max as a young man, and rather sal-low. Neither of these filled that description.

"Mebbe I ain't," retorted Job, bristling up, "but I'm his daddy, an' that is a heap better, I should say. You tell th' lady that she has got ter come down with some money, or out pops her secret."

"She won't have anything at all to do with you. She has directed me to put you out. She sent Max Barrows forty dollars only a little while ago."

"Forty dollars?"

So both bummers exclaimed in the same breath.

"Did you hear that, Dob?" Job gasped.

"I did," was the brief answer.

"An' all we got out of it was a fiver!"

"Not a red more."

"Come, you will have to go," urged Mr. Russelford, though he did not open the door for them yet.

He hoped that they would grow angry and let out their secret.

Job Barrows was wild. He was thinking of the way Max had been imposing upon him. If he had got but five dollars out of forty, what had the sum total been when he had occasionally got ten?

"Yes, but we ain't goin' yet," he cried, defiantly. "You jest tell that woman that she has got ter come down with fifty dollars hard cash, or out that secret goes."

"Well, I will tell her," Mr. Russelford agreed, "but I know what the answer will be."

He went away for a few moments again, but soon came back with the report that the lady would not see them at all, and that they must go.

"Does she mean biz?" asked Job.

"She is thoroughly in earnest," Mr. Russelford assured.

"Very well, then," said Job, "you kin tell Mr. Russelford that we want ter see him."

This placed the gentleman in something of a dilemma. He had to acknowledge his identity, however, as there was no other way. He was more than eager to get at the bottom of the secret.

"Well, I am Mr. Russelford," he owned.

"What did I tell ye?" cried Job, turning to Dob.

"You said you'd bet 't was him," responded Dob.

A sudden thought struck Job with great force. Had their presence been announced to the lady at all?

"You've been foolin' us," he declared. "You ain't told th' lady that we're here at all."

"No matter," was the response; "you can't see her; and now if you have got anything to say to me, say it and be off."

"I'll tell ye what," whispered Job, in confidence, "we've got a little secret, an' if we can't see th' lady, we'll sell out ter you. What'll you give fer what we know?"

Mr. Russelford was a new hand at such work, and did not know how to handle the matter. If it had only been Duke Daniels— But, it was not.

"See here," he replied, "you tell me what your secret is, my man, and I will pay you handsomely for the information."

Just then the policeman was heard to enter the lower hall.

"What d'ye call handsome?" Job asked.

"How does fifty dollars hit you?"

The tramp turned up his nose in disgust. He had been thinking about that fabulous sum—forty dollars—that Max had received, and in his wild imaginings had figured his own loss at thousands of dollars. He had big money in mind, and was determined to set his price high enough.

"Yer will have ter come up higher than that," he declared.

"Well, how much do you want?" Mr. Russelford asked.

"Five thousand dollars," was the prompt reply.

Job's partner's eyes bulged out, and he almost gasped for breath. His first thought was of one long, blissful, endless drunk.

"You are a crazy fool!" Mr. Russelford exclaimed indignantly. "I do not believe you have anything to tell, anyhow."

"You kin bet we have, then; ain't that so, Dob? But it will take jest that sum ter git it out of us; eh, Dob?"

"I should remark," was the laconic response.

The very mention of such a sum made the two bummers feel rich as lords already, and Mr. Russelford saw that there was no use in parleying longer with them, so he signaled for the policeman.

The officer had ascended silently to the top of the stairs, and now stepped out into sight and came forward.

"Officer, arrest these fellows," Mr. Russelford directed. "I charge them with trying to play a game of blackmail."

The policeman held his club ready for use, in case of resistance, and taking a pair of handcuffs from his pocket ordered the fellows to hold out their hands.

The bummers had turned pale at sight of him, and they were now in a great state of alarm. Their worst apprehension, in case of failure, had been a term on the island, but now that was magnified into a vision of State's Prison.

They both cowered back against the wall, and Job protested:

"No, no, it's all a mistake; we didn't go ter do it. We'll tell ye th' secret, sir, an' not a cent o' charge, if you'll only let us go. We don't want ter be too rough on you nobow, an' if—"

Seeing that they were not likely to resist, the officer stepped forward and handcuffed them together quickly.

"Now," he ordered, "you come along with me."

Just then came a ring at the bell.

The policeman pulled his prisoners out of the way, and Mr. Russelford opened the door.

To his great surprise and delight Duke Daniels stood before him!

The detective was himself again, and looked none the worse for his term of imprisonment.

He shook hands with Mr. Russelford, and stepped into the hall.

"Ha, what have we here?" he asked.

"This fellow claims to be the father of that Max Barrows," Mr. Russelford explained, "and he has come here to demand money of Mrs. Russelford. I have had him and his companion arrested."

"Job Barrows and Dob Ritters, eh? I am glad to get hold of them. Officer, you need not take them; I will assume charge of them."

"Just as the gentleman says," agreed the officer.

"Yes, let Daniels have them," Mr. Russelford directed.

"All right. I want my handcuffs, though."

"Take this pair in place of them," said the detective, and he handed the policeman a pair that were even better than the ones he had had.

His services no longer required, the policeman went away, and Daniels was left master of the situation.

"Now," said the detective, grimly, "you fellows have got to tell what you know. The best thing you can do is to go right ahead and tell a straight story."

"We'll talk fer what I said," mumbled Job, "an fer nothin' less."

"Well, what did you say?"

"Five thousan'."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the detective laughed, "that is pretty good, I must say. Why, five thousand cents would be a fortune to you. But, I guess we'll get what we want without paying anything for it. If not, to prison you go."

"We'll have that er nothin'; hey, Dob?"

"That's what we will," agreed Dob.

Their minds made up, they were not to be moved. They had got over their first fears, and were determined to hold out.

The detective threatened, but it did no good.

It was not courage with them, but dogged determination. They knew that if they let the secret out, their hold upon the woman would be forever broken, and they were resolved that they would reveal nothing unless well paid for it.

Daniels did not fool long with them. He had got from Mr. Russelford the particulars of what had taken place previous to his coming, and understood the whole situation.

"Well, we will not parley here," he said, sternly. "You will come with me, and I will take care of you. Mr. Russelford, I will call again in half an hour."

"All right; I shall be looking for you."

Daniels marched his prisoners out of the house, then, and in a short time they were confined in one of the cells in the house where his other prisoners were.

The detective had now two trusty men on guard there, and the prisoners were perfectly safe.

Having thus disposed of the two bummers, Daniels returned to Mr. Russelford, and he and that gentleman had a long consultation. When that was at an end the detective took his leave, setting out to pay a visit to the office of Swithin Brightley.

The mad game was coming to an end, and Duke Daniels now held the winning hand in it. It only remained for him to play his cards to advantage.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SUCCESS ALMOST ASSURED.

UNDER the influence of the Jezebel who had charge over her, Corinne Russelford's mind had almost been turned.

Perhaps it was only the pressure of jealousy that now kept her up.

That jealousy existed, can not be denied. It burned in her breast, and she looked forward to the time when she might have revenge.

That thought of revenge was not directed toward her husband, however, so much as toward Zara Royal.

It was she, she believed, who had been the cause of all the trouble that had come about.

For some purpose or other, she could not guess what, she had been removed to a rear room of the house. Mrs. Arnold said it was that her escape might be the more readily accomplished. In truth, it was that she might not see that her husband did not again visit Zara Royal.

Her one thought and her one desire was escape. That now held the place of first importance in her mind, and Mrs. Arnold lent her influence to keeping it in that place.

Finally, a third note came from Anthon Marchmont.

He had, he said, laid his plans so that he could visit her, if she would allow him to do so, and was still willing and anxious to aid her to escape. He begged her to accept his offer of help.

"You are very foolish if you don't," Mrs. Arnold urged. "My own plans drag awfully, and they are not sure of success anyhow. It will do no harm for you to see the gentleman and hear what he has to say. If I were you I would willingly jump at the chance."

"But," Corinne urged, "it would not be proper for me to accept his aid, would it?"

The woman laughed.

"I forgot to tell you," she said. "I have heard that your husband yesterday procured a divorce, and that being so, you are perfectly free. But, even were you not, what should hinder you from accepting help so honorably offered? Has not your husband cast you off?"

The woman's simulated friendship had been so well carried on that Corinne had grown to like and trust her, and it was a great blow to learn from her lips that she was no longer a wife—that her name was no longer Russelford.

Her mind had been so tortured that she was hardly able to think, and everything she heard was taken for granted, without consideration.

Finally she agreed to see Mr. Marchmont, and sent a brief reply in answer to his latest note.

He came promptly, and was conducted to her room.

He greeted her warmly, almost affectionately, but with sufficient reserve not to arouse her displeasure.

"True to my word I am here," he said, "and here to aid you to escape, if I can."

Corinne could not help admiring him, and the recollection that he had once been her lover was in her mind.

"I have concluded to accept your offer, Mr. Marchmont," she said, "and will trust you."

"You may trust me freely, fully," he declared. "You have no idea how I pity you, Corinne, and how I have longed for this opportunity. I know all about the baseness of your husband—your husband no longer! and my desire is to take you out of his power. Do you know that you are free?"

Corinne knew nothing about divorce and divorce law.

"So Mrs. Arnold has told me," she answered.

"Well, it is true, and the man who was once your husband has already married another."

"What?"

The woman sprang from her chair, her eyes fairly ablaze.

"It is the truth," the arch villain declared.

"And whom has he married?"

"Miss Zara Royal."

"Are you telling me the truth? Are you sure that this is so?"

"I can prove it to you. Here is the notice in the paper."

He took a newspaper from his pocket, turned to the column of marriage notices, and true enough there was the announcement—Henry Russelford to Miss Zara Royal.

The proof was convincing. Nothing more was wanting, and Corinne felt a feeling of hatred for her husband spring up in her heart.

Anthon Marchmont had had that newspaper printed especially, at no little expense, in imitation of the one of the date it bore, and had had the marriage notice inserted among the others it contained.

It was a big stroke, and it won him the victory in his dastardly plot.

But the end was not yet.

Seeing his advantage, he pushed it.

"Corinne," he said, "my whole desire, now, is to help you out of the power of that man, but I look for my reward in the future. I shall not mention that now, if you cannot guess it. Now are you ready to hear the plan of escape that I have laid?"

"Yes, I am ready for anything," was the reply.

"Very well, it is this: Not knowing what his intentions are with regard to you, I think it would be well for you to get as far away as possible for a time. I will engage passage for you and your child and Mrs. Arnold, to England. Mrs. Arnold has friends there, and you go over under the care of an old gentleman who is well known to me and whom you can trust fully."

"A few months abroad will strengthen you, and will cause you to forget your trouble and the rascal who has caused it. I dare call him a rascal, with the proof of his villainy to show. After that you will be free to do what you please, with me to help you in whatever you may desire. If you refuse this, no knowing what your fate will be. You may be kept here for weeks and months, and finally turned out without home or friends. What do you say to my proposition?"

Corinne sat like one in a dream, reading the marriage notice over and over again. She cared little what became of her now. Perhaps it would be better to get as far away as she possibly could.

"Yes, I accept your offer," she said.

"Very good. Now I know what to do, and will go right ahead. Let us call in Mrs. Arnold, and arrange the details with her."

At that moment Mrs. Arnold knocked and came in.

"We were just on the point of sending for you," the rascal remarked. "Your prisoner has consented to allow me to help her to escape, and we want your help in the matter."

"I am willing to help the poor child," said the woman, "but it must be understood that I must go with her. I could not remain here an hour after she had gone. I believe my life would be in danger."

"That is just what I want, you to go with her," the villain assured. "You may accompany her to England, and take care of her and the child as long as she desires to remain there."

"Oh! good!" the woman exclaimed. "That will be splendid; and such good times as we shall have, my dear!"

"But it will be necessary for you all to go in disguise," the arch rascal went on. "You, Mrs. Arnold, will fix yourself up as an old woman, and Mrs. Russelford can attire herself in mourning. The little one's hair can be cut off, and she can be clad as a boy. No one will ever suspect your identity."

"Are you willing, dear?" asked Mrs. Arnold.

"Yes, I am willing to do anything," was the weary response.

"Then we will begin to prepare this very day."

"Yes, you must do so," said Marchmont. "And you must be ready to depart at an hour's notice. The old gentleman I spoke of will call for you, and you will go with him. You will probably start day after to-morrow."

"We shall be ready," Mrs. Arnold promised.

Some further conversation followed, and then Anthon Marchmont went away, leaving his hireling to carry out the rest of the work.

When Marchmont left the house he went across the street to the house of Zara Royal.

He could do this without danger of being seen by Mrs. Russelford, as she had been moved into another room, as has been shown.

Zara greeted him cordially when he was shown into her presence, and they fell into conversation immediately.

"Well, how do our plans progress?" Zara inquired.

"You ought to know something about that," was the response.

"So I do, but not so much as you, of course. How are you getting on with your little grass-widow?" laughing.

"Splendidly," was the answer. "The game is won now, so far as she is concerned, and day after to-morrow she will start for England in

company of myself and the woman who has charge of her. Here, see this," and he handed her the paper that contained the marriage notice.

"Heavens!" Zara gasped, "have you had such a thing as that published? It will ruin my prospects entirely."

Marchmont laughed.

"Not so bad as that," he said. "This is a page that I had printed in imitation of one of the daily papers, and it is the only one that was struck. When the woman read this notice she was ready for anything."

"I should think so. Well, what more have you for me to do? I am as eager as you are to see the end of the matter."

"There is nothing for you to do now," was the response. "Just keep quiet until I have got Mrs. Russelford away, and then you can set to work to win Henry, in which I wish you the greatest success."

"You may be sure that I shall strive my best to win."

"I do not doubt that. But you must look out for one thing."

"And what is that?"

"That you do not overdo the matter. You may have to play your fish a long time before you can land him."

"Trust me for that."

"I know, but you need advice, all the same. Your first move must be to win his love. Pay no attention to anything else. Once that is gained, your game is won. He will seek a divorce, and you will soon be his lawful wife."

"I understand it perfectly. And I feel sure of success. That letter I sent him has cut him all up, my spies tell me."

"I should think it would. Our game has been a desperate one, Zara, but we have made it a bold one, and success is ours at last."

Their talk ran on to a great length, but enough of it has been quoted to set forth their scheme in full. Success seemed just within their grasp, but they were reckoning without Duke Daniels.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DANIELS GETS THE TRUTH.

MAX BARROWS was perched up on his high stool, hard at work. He was all alone in the office, Mr. Brightley having gone out, and he was whistling away merrily.

He had made up his mind to make no use of the information he had gained. It was none of his business, he had concluded, and he would not meddle with it. If he had not overheard the talk, he could do nothing anyhow; and having overheard it, he would not do anything.

He had a good situation, he was out of the reach of his drunken parent, the world opened up bright before him, and he would not run the risk of losing it all by meddling with what did not concern him.

Having come to this decision, he could afford to whistle and be merry.

While he was thus hard at work, the door opened and some one stepped into the office.

Glancing around to see who it was, the youth received a shock that almost knocked him off his stool.

There stood none other than the Mr. John Daws who had visited him at his former boarding-house!

Duke Daniels it was, and he was no less surprised than Max, but of course he did not let his surprise be seen.

"How are you, Mr. Barrows?" he greeted. "You see I have found you."

Oh, the ways and wiles of detectives! The impression made by this simple remark, upon the mind of Max Barrows, was that the detective had been on his track, and had craftily discovered him.

We know that it was a meeting by chance.

From the conversation he had overheard, Max knew that John Daws was in fact Duke Daniels, the detective, and this knowledge took all the "nerve" out of him in an instant.

A vision of handcuffs and prison doors flashed before his mind, and he slid down from his stool and began to whine for mercy.

"Don't arrest me, please don't, Mr. Daniels!" he begged. "I will tell you all I know if you will only let me off. I have a good job here, have got away from my old drunken dad, and I want to make somethin' of myself. Please don't be hard on me. My name here is John Hoil, so call me by that if any one comes in. Don't give me away, please don't! I will—"

"Shut up your whining!" the detective ordered; "who has said anything about arresting you? What have you done that you fear arrest? Tell me how you know that I am Duke Daniels."

"I heard Mr. Brightley and Mr. Clinkerly talking about you."

"Oh, you did, eh? Well, now, I want you to tell me what you heard. Don't you dare to keep a word back either."

"I am afraid Brightley will drop in on us."

"Well, if he does you can stop talking, and I will talk with him. You can come to my office just as soon as you get done here this afternoon. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And don't you fail to come there either, for if you do you will be arrested and brought there anyhow. One of my men will watch you."

"I'll come there, sir, if I am alive."

"So be it understood. Now, then, go ahead and talk till you see Brightley coming."

"Well, sir, I heard Brightley and his man Clinkerly talking, and I listened to what they had to say. It seems that they are mixed up in the Russelford case. Brightley had hired Clinkerly to put you and some other fellow out of the way, and they had done it."

"And you didn't take the trouble to tell the police, eh?" the detective observed.

"Well, you see, sir, I didn't think it was any funeral of mine, and if I went to meddlin' with it I would only get out of my job, and mebbe do no good anyhow. You see, I couldn't prove anything."

"Your sense of right is not very well developed, I see. But, go on with your story."

"Well, Clinkerly told how he had follered you when you was after me, and then I knowed that you was Daniels."

"I see. How did you come to get employment here?"

"There was a sign in the window, and I came in and got the place."

"Very good. Now, young man, I want to know all that you know about Mrs. Russelford, and what the secret is that gave you the hold you had upon her. Mind, you must tell me a straight story, or it will be the worse for you. Just imagine how it would feel to have these on your wrists," displaying a pair of handcuffs.

The youth paled, and promised that he would tell the whole truth, which he proceeded to do immediately.

Before he had finished his story, however, he saw Brightley coming, and had to cut short.

"There's Brightley," he ejaculated; "I'll see you this evening and tell you the rest, sir."

"All right, see that you do. Don't think that you can get away, for my man will be right at your heels."

Daniels dropped upon a chair and Max turned to his work, and when Brightley entered he could not suspect that anything had passed between them.

The detective had picked up a newspaper, and was holding it so that the man did not get a look at his face when he first entered.

As soon as Brightley had passed around the railing to his desk, however, the detective let the paper fall and stood up facing him.

The man paled, and had to grasp his desk for support.

"I want to have a little talk with you in private," Daniels announced.

"Come in and sit down, then," the rascal managed to say.

The detective did so, managing to display the butt of his revolver in a significant way as he sat down.

"Speak in a low tone," Brightley cautioned, with a jerk of his head toward his clerk.

"All right; to oblige you I will," the detective agreed; and he added:

"You made the greatest mistake of your life, Swinith Brightley, when you set to work to put me out of the way."

"What are you talking about?" the man demanded, evidently intending a game of bluff.

Daniels smiled.

"That will not serve your purpose," he said. "Why did you caution me not to speak too loud? You know well enough what I am talking about. I have got your man Clinkerly and his tool in my power, so it is of no use for you to deny anything."

"I do deny, though," the man declared, "and shall continue to do so. I can defy you to prove anything."

"If you mean that," the detective threatened, "I will arrest you here and now, and march you off to the lock-up. I do not intend to stand any fooling. You have not attempted my life for nothing."

A pair of handcuffs were brought out into sight, and Brightley came down from his high horse promptly.

"You have got the best hand," he said, "and I submit. What do you want to know?"

"I want to know all that you know about the Russelford mystery," was the direct answer. "You do not want to try to tell me any false story, either."

"If I will tell you all I can, will you let me slip out of the case?"

"I will make no terms with you whatever," was the prompt return. "You may make a clean breast of it all, or submit to immediate arrest, whichever you choose. I have no time to waste with you."

"Then you won't arrest me if I tell you all?" catching at that eagerly.

"No, I will not arrest you," was the promise.

"Very well, then, I will tell you everything. You have said that I never made a greater mistake than when I trapped you. I think I have. I made a bigger mistake when I took hold of this thing at all."

"Well, possibly you are right in saying that; but, go ahead with your story. Mind that you hold nothing back, however, or my promise may not hold good."

"I will tell you everything."

Brightley went ahead, then, and laid the whole case before the detective plainly, telling all the truth so far as he knew it.

"It is as I thought, only worse," the detective declared, when he had heard all. "No wonder that the mystery of their way of getting out of that room puzzled us as it did."

"It was certainly a well laid scheme," observed Brightley.

"You are right in saying that," agreed Daniels, "and one that should have met with success. There was no excuse for its failure. It would have been a mystery forever to the best detective the world ever saw, if it had been managed properly."

"Even as it is, I cannot understand how it has failed," said Brightley, honestly.

"It was overdone, as is always the case," the detective explained. "It is that very thing that plays into the hands of the detective every time," he declared.

"No doubt you are right. Now, am I done with the matter? You know you promised not to arrest me."

"You are done with it for the present," was the answer, "but you must appear as a witness in the case."

"I will not do it."

"Oh, yes you will! I have promised not to arrest you, but that does not let you off. One of my men will shadow you, and if you attempt to get away you will be bagged in short order. Do not forget that."

"You are a knave, sir," the man exclaimed. "You said that I should not be arrested."

"Neither shall you, unless you make it necessary by your conduct. I know you dread the exposure, but it has got to come, and your easiest way out of it is to appear as my witness."

"Curse you! you have fooled me!" the man cried. "I thought I was to get out of it all."

"I promised nothing of the sort, sir. All the understanding there was, was that you should not be arrested. Now I will take my leave of you."

The detective rose to go, and he was not hindered.

"Well, good-day, sir," in a louder tone than they had been employing; "call again."

"Thank you," Daniels returned, "I may have occasion to do so," significantly; and with a glance at Max Barrows, to let him feel the influence of his keen eyes once more as a reminder, the detective went away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEATLY TRIPPED AT LAST.

WHEN the detective returned to his office he found Roger Kempton awaiting his arrival.

The young reporter was in a state of the greatest mental agitation.

"Hello! what's up?" the detective demanded.

"I've got the truth," was the answer.

"The truth of what?"

"Of the Russelford mystery. That is to say, of that part of it in which Max Barrows has figured."

"Good enough! I have got the truth of all the rest of the case, so we are all right, or shall be, as soon as I get hold of the other birds that I want for my cage."

"I congratulate you," said the reporter. "You have done well. But here is something that will stagger you," and the young man leaned forward and said something in a lower tone.

The detective was surprised indeed. He leaned back in his chair with the exclamation:

"Well, I'm stumped! Who would have thought it?"

"No one would have thought it without knowing it," was the response. "But, Daniels, think of the position it puts me in! Think of the shame."

"Hold on there," the detective cried, "I can brighten your ideas in that line, my boy," and he drew from his pocket some old letters and a photograph that he got from Max Barrows.

"What have you there?" Kempton demanded.

"Hold on a moment and I'll show you," was the response, and the detective proceeded to undo the package of letters.

He remembered what Max had told him of the contents, and when he had opened the packet he drew out the legal-looking document of which mention has been made in another place.

Reading it, he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction and handed the paper over to the young man.

As soon as Kempton had read it he sprung to his feet with a cheer, and made a grab for the detective's hand, shaking it heartily.

"I am the happiest man in New York!" he exclaimed. "Why don't you congratulate me, Daniels?"

"Why don't you give me time?" was the laughing response. "I do congratulate you, my boy, and most heartily; but, come, sit down and let us talk business."

They had a long talk, and finally Kempton took his leave.

He went immediately to the telephone office

where Haidee Powers was employed. He had news which would interest her, and could not wait until evening to make it known to her.

She was found in her usual place, and greeted her lover with her usual exclamation—"Hello!"

"Pardon my intrusion," Kempton apologized, "but I have such good news to tell you that I could not wait."

"What can it be?" Haidee questioned.

"You could never guess," Kempton put off.

"I shall not try, so you will have to tell me, anyhow."

The young reporter said a few words in a lower tone, and Haidee exclaimed:

"Oh, I am so glad; but, then, that would not have made a particle of difference with me."

"Perhaps not, Haidee; but it made all the difference in the world to me, and I am happy that the mystery is cleared up."

Of course the reader has guessed the truth, but if not he will learn it a little further on.

Late that afternoon Max Barrows called at the office of the detective, and Daniels got all the information out of him that the youth could give.

It would have been impossible for the young man to have run away, for one of the detective's men had been upon his track from the time he had left the office.

When Max had confessed everything he could, then the detective told him something that surprised him not a little.

"You say my father isn't the right Barrows at all?" he repeated in question.

"That is what I do say," the detective assured.

"And that I am not myself?"

Daniels laughed.

"You are yourself, sure enough, I guess," he said, "but you are not anybody else. You are certainly not the person you have supposed yourself to be."

"But, dad was sure of it," he protested.

"Say," the detective demanded, showing the photograph that Job Barrows had carried with him, "do you suppose that your father was ever such a good-looking man as this picture shows?"

"I have often thought of that," Max answered, "but he has always told me it was his own likeness."

"Then he has always lied," declared the detective, flatly. "But," he added, "I will know more of this soon, for I shall go to your dad and make him talk."

"I hope you will, sir, for now I am anxious to know who I am."

"You shall know it all when the time is ripe. Do not try to run away, for it will be of no use. My men are watching you all the time. Don't let that fact get out of your mind. When I send for you, you want to come to me, too."

"I will do it, sir, and you can depend on me."

Max was allowed to go, and the detective set out for the house where he had his prisoners confined.

His men were wide awake to their duty, and there was little danger that any of the prisoners would escape.

Daniels went to the cell occupied by the two bummers, led them out and up to the floor above, and proceeded to question them.

"It is five thousand or nothin'," muttered Job.

"That's what it is," echoed Dob.

The pair had talked the whole thing over, and had made up their minds to stick to that, no matter what came of it.

Daniels took a small flask of whisky from his pocket, allowed them to smell of it, and then set it upon the table just out of their reach.

"Answer my questions," he said, "and that is yours."

Dob looked at Job and Job looked at Dob.

"I am mighty dry," muttered Job.

"My throat is jest a-crackin'," declared Dob.

This was a temptation they had no thought of meeting.

"Shall I split?" asked Job.

"I think I would," Dob advised.

"That settles it!" cried Job. "Fer th' love o' goodness, mister, hand me that likker," he demanded; "an' I'll tell ye everything I know!"

Daniels produced another of the flasks and placed it beside the first.

"Talk first," he said, "and then each of you shall have one of these."

"Fire in your questions," said Job, "an' I'll talk like a house afire."

The detective began, and in a little time he had learned all that the wretch could tell him.

"Now, true to my word," said the detective, when they had done, "I'll give you your flasks. Here they are."

He handed one to each, and they applied them to their lips instantly.

"May your spirit wax strong!" cried Job, when he had tasted.

"May you live forever!" wished Dob.

"May you be the father of a nation!"

"May your flocks cover th' hills!"

"May your children—"

"There, there, let up," broke in the detective; "I will take you back to your cell. You had better play light on your bottles, so as to make them last you a long time. You are not likely to get any more."

He returned them to their cell, had a talk with his men and went away.

The detective had his hands about full, arranging his plans, but he went about the work like the veteran he was, and finally all was completed.

Mrs. Arnold had set to work immediately, and in a brief time she had Mrs. Russellford and child and herself ready for the voyage.

They now awaited the coming of the old gentleman who was to be their traveling companion.

On the afternoon of the second day he came to the house, and everything being ready, it did not take the two women long to don their traveling-dress and set out.

They entered the carriage, little Eulalie clad as a boy, and the old gentleman directed the driver to drive to one of the steamship docks.

The carriage rattled away, Mrs. Russellford being more in a dream than in active wakefulness of mind. She had moved, talked and acted as though partly in a stupor, and in such she was, for her coffee had been drugged that morning to produce the desired effect.

The carriage rumbled along, and its curtains being down, no one within paid any attention to its course.

Finally it stopped, and the moment it did so the door was flung open and a voice exclaimed:

"Anthon Marchmont, you are my prisoner!"

There stood Duke Daniels, a revolver in hand, and two of his men at his back; and instead of being at the steamship dock, the carriage was standing in front of the house where the detective had his prisoners caged!

At first the arch villain was too surprised to speak, but at length he managed to say:

"I think you have made a mistake, sir; I am not the person you name."

With a quick motion Daniels snatched off the false hair and beard the fellow had on, and Marchmont was revealed!

In another moment handcuffs were snapped on his wrists, and he was pulled out of the carriage and led into the house.

Mrs. Arnold was served in the same manner, and with but little ceremony, and then Mrs. Russellford and her child were helped out and conducted into the house after them.

Daniels had played a trump card, and had won the trick in the neatest possible way.

When he was led into the house and into the parlor, Anthon Marchmont was amazed at the company he found there assembled. He had not dreamed of anything but success, and the suddenness and completeness of his defeat made it all the more overwhelming.

He sunk down upon a chair, pale and trembling, and awaited what he knew was coming—a complete and full exposure of his monstrous piece of villainy.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RIDDLE SOLVED.

THE company assembled in that room was a mixed one.

In one corner was a group of reporters, policemen and others interested in the case.

Elsewhere around sat all who had taken any active part in it.

Daniels had done his work well, and his net was full at the final haul. He had won a big game, and it only remained now to make the grand expose.

Mr. Russellford was there, but owing to their disguise he did not recognize his wife and child when they were brought in.

Roger Kempton, Haidee Powers and Mrs. Belows were seated by themselves, not far from Mr. Russellford, and Mrs. Russellford was shown to a seat near them.

The lady was dazed, and, owing to the drug that had been given to her, could hardly realize what had taken place.

Zara Royal was there, too, with her maid, Beatrix Penne; and the latter's lover was with them. He, it will be remembered, was the man who had accompanied Beatrix in the carriage when she was impersonating Mrs. Russellford.

The two bummers were there in all their dirt and rags, and they sat side by side, handcuffed together. Anthon Marchmont, Swithin Brightley, Rabab Clinkerly, Pilate Dunkers and Black Jack made up the rest of the company.

When the doors had been closed, after the entrance of the detective and his new prisoners, and quiet reigned, Duke Daniels stepped forward and spoke.

"The great Russellford mystery, which has held our city fairly spellbound for some time," he began, "is a mystery no longer. To-morrow morning the papers will all publish in full the answer to the enigma."

"On the morning of November fourth, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Russellford awoke to find that their little daughter, Eulalie, had mysteriously disappeared from the room during the night. As the doors were all locked and the windows covered with netting, no one could account for the manner in which the child had been taken from the room."

"The matter was reported to the police, and Mr. Russellford engaged me upon the case. It was a puzzle. Various suspicions were aroused,

some of which pointed to the husband and some to the wife. None of them was right. Two days later Mrs. Russellford disappeared in the same manner, and the mystery was deeper and darker than ever, and no solution could be offered.

"It is not necessary, however, for me to go over the case at length. The papers have set it forth in full. What my object is now is to set forth the solution, and to make right a wrong that has been done to a husband and wife, at the same time removing barriers that have been raised between them."

"The chief conspirators were Anthon Marchmont and Zara Royal, whom you see before you. These were at one time almost lovers, but they met, at about the same time, the one Corinne Tetteigh and the other Henry Russellford, and their regard turned from each other to their newer acquaintances. Things went on in this way for some time, and no doubt marriage would have been the result in both cases had not Henry Russellford and Corinne Tetteigh happened to meet."

"Mr. Russellford and Miss Tetteigh loved at first sight, so to say, and the others, Anthon Marchmont and Zara Royal, were left to make the best they could of the new situation. They both loved, not each other, but the ones they had lost, and Anthon Marchmont vowed, though not openly, that he would have revenge upon Henry Russellford, and that he would finally possess the woman he loved."

"He and Miss Royal did not return to each other, but each cherished the one thought of revenge and the one hope that they might yet gain the ones they loved. It was a peculiar and unheard-of state of affairs, but so the situation stood, and Anthon Marchmont lost little time in beginning to lay plans for carrying out his evil designs."

"He had plenty of wealth, and felt that he could afford to take his time, knowing that the longer he waited the heavier the blow would seem when it fell. He engaged the services of Swithin Brightley, a real-estate and insurance agent who had just started into business and who was glad to do his bidding, especially as the pay was to be large."

"Through this man Marchmont bought up some houses, and to two of them he gave especial attention. He had some machinery put in one, so that a whole section of wall could be moved at pleasure, and thus access to the other house had at will. When he had made sure that the machinery would do the work required of it, and that the wall could be moved noiselessly, he managed things so that Henry Russellford bought the second house and moved into it."

"All this required fine play, and took a long time to bring about; but at last the desired end was reached, and all was ready for the villainous scheme to be set in motion. Marchmont paid a visit to Zara Royal, disclosed his plans to her, and she was more than ready to help him. The first step taken was the stealing of the little child. The moving wall clearly explains now how that was accomplished. The child was taken to a woman named Mrs. Arnold, and was put into her care. Then only a short time later the mother was taken in the same manner."

Listening to this, Mrs. Russellford's mind gradually grew clearer, and she now saw her husband for the first time. He had heard some of this before, but not all.

"The main part of the scheme," the detective went on, "now that this much had been accomplished, was to force the husband and wife to believe that each had been false to the other. And, by their hateful methods, they almost fully gained the desired result. I must set these points forth in full."

This he proceeded to do, but it is not necessary that we should quote him in full, since the reader has a clear understanding, now, of all the points involved.

By the time he had done, Mrs. Russellford's eyes were opened to the truth, and with a cry she rushed into her husband's arms. It was a surprise to him, for he had not recognized her. Now, however, he could see the transformation that had taken place in the appearance of Eulalie, and all that had puzzled him was made clear. He received his wife with every indication of fond affection.

From that point explanations followed thick and fast. The detective did not omit a single item that might leave anything in obscurity, but set forth everything.

The "Max Barrows" part of the affair, and the hold he had had upon Mrs. Russellford, were explained away to the satisfaction of all.

Mrs. Russellford's sister, Sybil, seven years older than she, had been sent to a boarding-school at the age of fourteen. She was there two years, when, at the age of sixteen, she suddenly died. When taken ill, her parents were sent for, but she was dead when they reached the place. She had been unconscious, had been unable to tell anything, and everything was a mystery. One great fact was presented, however. She had given birth to a child—a boy, and the conclusion was only the natural one under the circumstances. The poor girl's father would not even bury her body, but returned

home immediately, taking his wife with him. The school authorities buried the body, gave out the report that it was a case of contagious disease, the doctor took the child away and the matter was hushed up as speedily as was possible. The suspicion in the matter was one thing, but the truth was quite another. Sybil had married secretly one Joseph Barrows, a cadet in the navy, who was home for a season, and, as he was not of age, their union was kept secret. He was called away to join his ship soon afterward, and in going he took Sybil's certificate with him, as it had been intrusted to his care, the girl having been afraid her schoolmates would discover it if she kept it in her possession. This young man's name, by the way, had been mentioned in connection with the affair. Sybil wrote to him several times, and received letters in reply, all of which she had burned as soon as read, and finally came the news of his sudden death at sea. It was that that had stricken her down suddenly and prematurely. She gave birth to her child, and passed away without a chance to say a word in defense of her good name.

This matter was, ever after that, a skeleton in the closet of the Tetteigh family. On the ship with Joseph Barrows was a sailor named Job Barrows. They were of no relation to each other, so far as they knew, but their names being the same no doubt led to a friendship between them. When the cadet was taken sick, and was told that he was likely to die, he called Job Barrows to him and gave him the certificate and some letters and a photograph, telling him to see that they were delivered to his wife. He told the sailor his story, and gave him full directions. Job went to the town where the school was, learned something of the truth, and, being a rascal, resolved to profit by it. He had a boy of his own, Max, and taking him to Mr. Tetteigh, demanded money for his keep or threatened to expose the secret. He drew money in this way first from Mr. Tetteigh, then from his widow, and finally from Corinne. After Corinne's marriage, she was all the more willing to pay in order that the dark secret might not become known to her husband. It was only when Roger Kempton set out to investigate the matter that the truth came to light concerning Sybil's child. He learned that the name of the doctor who had taken the babe was Kempton, and further investigation revealed to him the startling truth that he himself was the child! Taken all in all, it was a most peculiar case.

The mysterious "I. C. Allthings," who had played so important a role in the drama, was Anthon Marchmont himself. He was assisted, however, by one of his servants. But he had, as the detective declared, overreached himself.

Point after point was brought out, and everything was cleared up and explained fully.

It need not be said that it was an interesting hour.

"And now, Mr. Russelford," the detective finally asked, "what is your pleasure regarding my prisoners?"

"If there is any law in the land," was the firm response, "they shall feel the full weight of it. Have them locked up, and I will appear against them."

This was done, with the exception of Brightley and Max Barrows, who were to give evidence against the others, even to Zara Royal. No further favor was shown to any. Later on, Brightley was arrested, too, as he was found about leaving for the West.

Those who could offer bail did so, and Marchmont and Zara were quick to take advantage of that privilege.

They were not heard of again in years; but, at last it was learned that they had married, and were enjoying life in Russia.

Brightley, Clinkerly, Dunkers, and the rest of the minor rascals were less fortunate, and felt the weight of the law. Mrs. Arnold and Beatrix Penne disappeared at about the same time that Zara Royal did, and it was inferred that they went with her to the land of the Czar.

Job Barrows and Dob Ritters served out their short terms, and at last accounts were again in Gotham, as thirsty as ever.

Max cut loose from his parent, drifted West, and, taking Mrs. Russelford's advice, made a man of himself, after all.

The clouds having all cleared away, Mr. and Mrs. Russelford were again happy in each other's love, with nothing to mar.

It need not be said that they moved out of that house promptly, and took up their residence elsewhere.

Roger Kempton and Haidee Powers were married, ere many months had rolled by, and a happier couple it would be hard to find. Kempton retained the name he had carried so long, and had it made his own legally. Two children bless their home, and they are named Duke and Sybil. Kempton is still in literature, and now holds an editorial post on the paper he served so faithfully as a reporter.

Duke Daniels is still in the harness, and his sign may be seen in its old place on Murray Hill. He is widely known, is greatly liked and respected, and is always spoken of as the Society Detective.

THE END.

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